**PODCAST: Learning analytics: Why, What, How – Valuable tool for teachers and learners**

**Episode 3, part 2: How do I use learning analytics in my teaching?**

This is a “Why, What, How” podcast series in which we delve into the world of data and learning analytics from the perspective of teachers and learners.

In the third episode of our podcast, we'll hear how teachers from different fields leverage learning analytics in their own teaching. In the second part, our guest is **Emilia Teerikangas**, lecturer in community education at Centria University of Applied Sciences. Emilia teaches topics related to theology and church work, such as the fundamentals of the Bible, mission work, diaconia, church youth work, confirmation work, and early childhood education in the church. The host of the episode is **Olesia Kullberg**, lecturer at LAB University of Applied Sciences.

OLESIA KULLBERG

Welcome to the ‘Learning analytics: Why, What, How – Valuable tool for teachers and learners’ series, where we’ll focus on the basics of learning analytics and why its use is so central in the development of teaching. We’ll discuss the role of learning analytics in supporting decision-making by teachers and how it can help students succeed. The podcast series is part of the Digivisio work of higher education institutions.

In the episode How to use learning analytics in my teaching?, I’ll interview three teachers and find out how they use learning analytics in their teaching.

I’m Olesia Kullberg, Senior Lecturer at LAB University of Applied Sciences, and I have an expert guest here today, Emilia Teerikangas, lecturer in community pedagogy at Centria University of Applied Sciences.  Welcome, Emilia!

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

Thank you, thank you, it’s nice to be here.

OLESIA KULLBERG

Would you like to tell us which courses you usually teach?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

Well, I teach the future church youth work supervisors in community pedagogy education. So, I deal with this sort of theological and clerical stuff. I teach a little about the basics of the Bible, about the mission and diaconal work, church youth work, confirmation school work, church early childhood education and care work, and so on.

OLESIA KULLBERG

Well, it's wonderful to hear that you also use learning analytics in these courses. Would you like to tell us which learning analytics tools you usually use in your own study units?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

We use the itslearning learning environment. Considering my field, I can't really use automated tests as a final exam, for example. Of course, I can use them to some extent, but perhaps I feel that learning analytics is helpful in guidance, study tracking and developing my own work. So, I examine these matters: has the student viewed the materials, have they completed the assignments, how much time have they spent on studying the materials, and what types of materials have they looked at and what have they completed. These are the types of things that I might check from there.

OLESIA KULLBERG

What is the name of these tools there and is it easy to use them?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

You know, they’re easy so that if you want to track these things, you’ll find reports that you can open in the course, and you’ll be able to examine them at the group level. For example, how much time did they spend in the learning environments, what materials have they accessed and which activities; and you can also examine each student individually. You can also look at the progress of an individual student, for example, see how they’re progressing. Or you can get a big picture of how often the materials have been accessed in general. And the reports are really easy, and they're just a few clicks away.

OLESIA KULLBERG

How do you usually analyse the data, what purpose does it serve?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

Well, some of our courses may have active participation in the learning environment as one of the assessment criteria. That means I can monitor the student's progress as part of the assessment. However, in addition to the assessment, one important aspect is the perspective of guidance: if the student hasn’t opened the materials or hasn’t completed the assignments there, then you can contact them and say, ‘I noticed that you haven't been there, so is there some sort of a problem’. Is the student unable to access the learning environment for some reason, are they unable to use it or is there something challenging in the materials? And if there are difficult tasks and they've gone through the materials, but the tasks aren’t going well, then you can think where the challenge lies and whether it’s good to guide them to the special needs teacher or do something else. Perhaps another perspective is the development of your own work. I mean, I can see which materials attract the student to access them, what they spend time on, what gets less attention. And then, for example, can the student complete the assignments with the materials they have? It may be that the problem isn’t in the student, but it’s in my material or assignment. Of course, if you notice that some material arouses interest, then you should do more of that.

OLESIA KULLBERG

How long have you used learning analytics?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

I think we've used itslearning for two or three years. In the last couple of years or so it’s slowly sneaked into my work. There’s still a lot to develop, too, you know, you should remember to do a couple of clicks and go check how the students are doing.

OLESIA KULLBERG

So, since you’re a recent user of learning analytics, you’ll remember very well how it was without it. How have you benefitted from using learning analytics?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

I started working as a teacher six years ago. So, I haven't done this for such a long time. But I’ve noticed that when you track learning analytics, especially if there are many students who you have very little contact teaching with, and when you go to check it out, you can see who you should remind about the tasks that are waiting; or who you should contact; or if I should send a reminder message to the entire group or something like that. I feel that it makes work easier when I can track the students and see who I should be reminding about things. Then, maybe they submit the assignments on time, and I don't necessarily have to wait until the student contacts me saying ‘I can't log in here now, or I can't do this assignment, or I'm not making progress now.’ When you notice it yourself, it makes your work easier and it feels like you're better connected with a student who you may not meet in person.

OLESIA KULLBERG

You pointed out that you also monitor how students view the material you prepare and what appeals to them. Have you noticed what they prefer?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

We did one pilot course, High Flex, and we made podcasts for it. So, I've noticed that podcasts that you can listen to while jogging or something, or that you make videos (not a lecture, but a small introduction video to different things), it’s like even though I like everything in text and PowerPoint presentations, it seems quite a lot the students are happier to listen or watch the materials.

OLESIA KULLBERG

You said that the active use of the learning environment in some courses is part of the assessment. Is there anything else about learning analytics that you include? Does it improve the assessment in any way? Does it affect anything?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

Of course, we have all the assignments that need completing in the analytics, which grade and, of course, they also come from there. But I think best thing has been, first of all, that if I’m hesitating between two possible grades, I can go and view them. Sometimes, unfortunately, the student isn’t satisfied with the grade they got for the course or feels that there have been really difficult questions in the exam. So, there may be situations where when I go and have a look, I notice that, unfortunately, this student hasn’t spent much time there and hasn’t even viewed all the materials. In other words, it may also be something that can be discussed with the student and, hopefully, somehow clarifies the idea that the intention is to use the materials to do things independently there, or even if you participate in contact teaching, the idea is to review the topic and complete the assignments. Maybe you can get some interaction there and you can also show the student that this information would have been available in these and these materials.

OLESIA KULLBERG

By the way, do students have any opportunities to see the results of learning analytics in the itslearning environment?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

Well, they see the same data that I see, but, of course, they only see it for themselves. And if it’s used in assessment, of course we’ll say so at the beginning of the course. But I do at least try to remind everyone at the beginning of each course that you need to remember that I can track your progress from here and that you can track it yourself. Because it’s also quite important to the student that there’s a place where they can see which materials they've accessed.

OLESIA KULLBERG

Have you noticed any limitations in the use of learning analytics? Is there some feature you might want, but you can't get it from there or it somehow measures something in a way that you can't trust entirely.

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

Yeah, I can’t say what I’d like because I'm just getting started with this, but I'm thinking of, for example, that if the assessment places a great deal of emphasis on active work, the student can open the material and leave it open, and the clock is ticking showing they're active there but doing something else at the same time. And it doesn't say everything anyway, because if a student downloads a PDF file from there and logs out of the learning environment, you can’t use that directly as such to say so now you’ve been studying for this and this long. They may study a lot even if the learning environment is closed. That’s why I think the assessment can’t be based on one thing: how long someone's been there, but that it can be used in a counselling discussion. And, of course, in my own work, when it’s not possible to use automated tests or such, because in our studies it's quite important to reflect and understand things, well, I’ve not yet come up with how learning analytics monitors that.

OLESIA KULLBERG

What would you say to a teacher who’s now thinking: should I introduce learning analytics; will this involve too much work for me since I need to learn something new again? What advice would you give, what tips?

EMILIA TEERIKANGAS

Well, I don't think it's necessary to choose whether you start using it or not. At least in the itslearning learning environment, it’s already there. You can first carefully have a look at it and what you have there, and then gradually pick out the things that you might find important. You’ll learn to discern what grabs your attention and you move on from there. I don't think this is a matter of either this or that.

OLESIA KULLBERG

Thank you, Emilia, so much for this interview! Thank you!

Thank you also to the listeners for joining in this interesting discussion on the practical applications of learning analytics in education. We hope this podcast gave you the impetus to gather useful information about your students’ learning process and how you can apply it. Olesia Kullberg is responsible for producing and editing the episode.