

Chapter I

Learning Design Representations to Document, Model, and Share Teaching Practice

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ABSTRACT

The term “learning design” is gaining momentum in the e-learning literature as a concept for supporting academics to model and share teaching practice. Its definition and composition is evolving, and as such, there is currently no standard mode of representation for learning designs in education. Instead, there are several emerging learning design representations with different perspectives about their purpose. This chapter explores these issues and presents a summary of the current discourse about learning designs. The aim of this chapter is to address a gap in the literature by comparing and contrasting six learning design representations. The chapter discusses the research conducted to date about learning design representations and concludes by proposing a pathway for further research.

INTRODUCTION

In the higher education sector today, more so than ever before, academics are presented with many choices in how they can design and deliver their courses. As the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching

becomes mainstream, academics are faced with the challenge of making decisions on how best to integrate such technology within their teaching practice. In an environment where there is an increasing number of Internet tools available (e.g., blogs and wikis) and online educational resources to choose from (e.g., learning objects),

this is a difficult task. Coupled with the constant focus in the sector on improving the quality of teaching and learning (e.g., Transcript, 2004) decisions on how to effectively integrate ICT to design pedagogically sound learning experiences can be quite overwhelming.

To add a further layer of complexity, the concept of a “university course” has broadened from a conventional model of synchronous teaching and learning activities (e.g., lectures and tutorials) to “unexplored dimensions” that include Internet based activities and the overall use of digital media to present, interact, and communicate in both synchronous and asynchronous modes (Botturi, 2006). Botturi has argued that the design of such courses to effectively integrate technologies is too complex for one person and requires the expertise of a teaching team. Unfortunately, unlike externally funded educational multimedia development projects where a team (composed of subject matter experts, instructional designers, programmers, and graphics artists led by a project manager) works together to craft a multimedia educational solution, the university teaching context is more individually focused where teachers are mostly required to fend for themselves in the design of their courses.

Thus, teachers need guidance and advice provided in an efficient and effective form to support them to create innovative pedagogy. But what form should this guidance take in order for it to be efficient and effective? There is a substantial body of literature that explains how contemporary learning theories can be implemented effectively in practice with the use of technology. The predominant form for this guidance is the text-based scholarly representation presented in journals, conference publications, and books where, through a range of descriptive and analytical case studies, lessons learned are documented and pedagogical design principles are distilled. The argument is mounting that this way of representing and disseminating guidance is difficult for practitioners to easily access and

thus needs improvement (Goodyear, 2005; Oliver, 2006; Oliver & Littlejohn, 2006; Sharpe, Beetham, & Ravenscroft, 2004). Particularly in the area of e-learning, this issue needs to be addressed: “In the field of e-learning where there is pressure for rapid changes in response to emerging research, there is discussion on how we develop a more suitable and sophisticated discourse that is shared by researchers and practitioners, and which supports and promotes educational change” (Sharpe et al., 2004, p. 16). Oliver and Littlejohn (2006) have argued that the way practitioners currently document their practice is limited and there is a lack of examples in a form that practitioners can apply in their own teaching context. Botturi (2006, p. 267) concurred with respect to limited documentation and suggested that improvement in documentation is required:

After a course has been developed, usually the only documentation is the actual learning materials. This raises some issues in the case where a redesign or adaptation process is required for reuse, especially where the original designer is not available. Is it possible to produce a documentation that can guide the reuse and adaptation of the instruction?

Oliver and Littlejohn (2006) have called for more *appropriate guidance* on effective pedagogical practice provided in an *appropriate form* that teachers can easily apply, adopt, adapt, and reuse. Laurillard (2002, p. 1) suggested a similar idea: “There would be great value in a programme of work to identify effective learning activity models, and build standardized descriptions of the forms they take.” Goodyear (2005, p. 82) too has agreed with these ideas but has argued that appropriate guidance is one that informs, not prescribes: “There is a substantial unmet demand for usable forms of guidance. In general, the demand from academic staff is for help with design—for customizable, reusable ideas, not fixed, pre-packaged solutions.” Oliver (2006) has

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