Chapter II
Representing Models of Practice

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ABSTRACT

Practice models are generic approaches to the structuring and orchestration of learning activities for pedagogic purposes, intended to promote sharing of effective e-learning practice. This chapter surveys the background to the idea of practice models, and then examines the issues surrounding their representation that emerged from the UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)-funded Mod4L project. These issues are ones of purpose, design as a process, granularity, community, and characterisation. It analyses the purpose and the metaphor for design, coupled with consideration of the audience for practice models, suggesting that while generic models are useful for technical developers, they may not be an effective way of sharing teaching practice. The possibility that a rich domain map coupled with community building activities and richly contextualised exemplars might be more effective is briefly discussed. The complex interactions of characteristics of a design representation underpin the necessity for different representations to fulfil different user needs.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of "design for learning" has arisen in the context of three challenges that face teachers in further and higher education: the increasing size and diversity of the student body; an increasing requirement for quality assurance; and the rapid pace of technological change that is fueling a demand for personalised learning and calling into question traditional ideas of the purposes of education and what constitutes knowledge (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007; CIHE, 2002; DfES, 2001).

The solution to these challenges is often sought in use of new technological tools for scaleable and flexible delivery and for sharing and reuse of teaching activities. Yet, despite substantial institutional

investment in information and communication technologies (ICTs), there is little evidence that education has changed in any fundamental way at the level of teacher practice (Collis & Van der Wende, 2002; Seufert & Euler, 2004).

One reason suggested for the lack of impact is that e-learning development and e-learning research have followed parallel courses, with the development of tools, systems, and services and their associated standards on the one hand, and investigations into how these can support effective learning and teaching on the other (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007; JISC, 2006). To help bridge this gap, there is a perceived need for practitioner-focused resources describing a range of learning designs and offering guidance on how these may be chosen and applied, how they can support effective practice in design for learning, and how they can support the development of effective tools, standards, and systems with a learning design capability (see, e.g., Griffiths & Blat, 2005; JISC, 2006).

The recent UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) Design for Learning programme aimed explicitly to bring the two areas of work together (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning_pedagogy/elp_design-learn.aspx). JISC's overall remit is to support UK further and higher education by providing strategic guidance and advice about the use of information and communication technologies in learning and teaching. Among the aims of the Design for Learning programme were to (JISC, 2006):

- Help improve the quality of e-learning in the UK
- Assist teaching practitioners with gaining confidence and skills in managing and facilitating e-learning in different contexts and with different pedagogic approaches
- Provide easy access to high quality, flexible learning materials
- Identify effective approaches to e-learning practice

- Create examples of effective practice in learning, teaching, and supporting technology

Projects worked closely with teachers in exploring the processes of designing for learning, sharing and reusing designs, evaluating the tools used, and developing new planning tools that are grounded in teachers' existing practice and needs.

The idea of design for learning offers practical benefits to teachers in further and higher education in terms of improved teaching quality and efficiency. However, before these benefits can be realised, there are a number of issues to overcome. The issues can largely be classified as institutional and representational. This chapter explores the representational ones, considering issues of purpose and audience of a representation and the potential uses of generic "practice models." It is based largely on the findings of the Mod4L practice models project, one of the projects of the JISC Design for Learning programme (http://www.mod4l.com/tiki-index.php; Falconer, Beetham, Oliver, Lockyer, & Littlejohn, 2007).

The overall aim of the Mod4L project was to develop a range of practice models that can be used by teachers in real life contexts and have a high impact on improving teaching and learning practice. Practice models have been defined as *generic approaches to the structuring and orchestration of learning activities. They express elements of pedagogic principle and allow teachers to make informed choices* (JISC, 2006). To be effective and sustainable, practice models should be grounded in authentic practice and represented in ways that are meaningful to teachers. In this sense, practice models need to be both *representations of effective practice (signify* successful instances of good practice) *and effective representations of practice* (have high impact on practice).

In the UK, a number of initiatives have represented the structure and orchestration of effective learning designs in a variety of forms, such as

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