Chapter IV

Web-Based Learning: Experience-Based Research

Val Clulow
Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

Jan Brace-Govan
Monash University, Australia

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, a synthesis of work from several evaluative studies that the authors have undertaken on the different experiences professionals and students have had with Web-based education is provided. Provided are perspectives from undergraduate and postgraduate students and from academic staff members who have experienced learning and teaching in a Web-based environment. Reflection on these sources of experience provides a number of indicators for improvements to approaches to staff development for online teachers, for the preparation of students for an online learning environment, and for student-centered Web-based design.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, formal education and procedural training and management skill development is being accommodated through Web-based learning. Our recent experience and research on the provision of Web-based learning in the higher education sector has shown that although Web-based technologies are well received, there continue to be issues for teachers, learners, and instructional design. This article draws from several projects, each of which was designed to evaluate and reflect on various aspects of the development of different Web-based learning sites. In one project, a professional journal was kept to assess the similarities and differences between traditional distance learning and Web-based learning. In another project, undergraduate students were asked to keep a reflective diary of their
experiences of a unit that was delivered entirely online with no support materials, so that we
could better understand how they engaged with, and felt about, the process of learning in
this environment. The next project was based around interviews with postgraduate students
taken at the end of a semester of Web-based learning. In this unit, the students’ Web-based
learning was supplemented by printed materials and a CD of resources. The evaluation
interviews, conducted by a nonteaching staff member, asked how the students compared the
Web-based learning experience with face-to-face classrooms. For the student diary study
and the interview study, the original data were reanalyzed and are presented here in an original
form for the specific and integrated focus this chapter takes. Another evaluation procedure
available to staff is the analysis of bulletin board postings from a class conference. Here, two
projects are reported, one analysis of postings utilized a cognitive framework, while another
utilized the business-based concept of the “experience economy.” Therefore, there are five
sources of experiential data, each providing a component part to the picture of Web-based
education in a large Australian university, as follows:

- Marketing academic’s experience with planning and design of Web-based learning
  materials
- Undergraduate students’ experience with learning via Web-based materials, as re-
  ported through electronic diaries
- Postgraduate students’ views of their experience with learning online, reported
  through telephone interviews
- Postgraduate students’ learning experience reported through an analysis of their
  bulletin board discussion, using Henri’s (1992) analytical framework
- Application of a business model based on the concept of the “experience economy”
  (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) to an education-focused bulletin board discussion

The five experiential studies that have contributed to our understanding of current
issues and directions for the future are summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Web-Based Education: Learning from Experience**
Related Content

Utilizing Web Tools for Computer-Mediated Communication to Enhance Team-Based Learning
Elizabeth Avery Gomez, Dezhi Wu, Katia Passerini and Michael Bieber (2007). International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 21-37).
www.irma-international.org/article/utilizing-web-tools-computer-mediated/2981/

Letting Go and Letting the Angels Grow: Using Etienne Wenger's Community of Practice Theory to Facilitate Teacher Education
www.irma-international.org/article/letting-go-and-letting-the-angels-grow/123159/

A Description of Online Instructors Use of Design Theory
MarySue Cicciarelli (2010). Web-Based Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications (pp. 293-301).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/description-online-instructors-use-design/41347/

Building Quality Online Courses: Online Course Development Partnership and Model
www.irma-international.org/chapter/building-quality-online-courses/165788/

Definition and History of Online Professional Development
www.irma-international.org/chapter/definition-history-online-professional-development/68297/