

Chapter 33

Towards an Adult Learning Architecture of Participation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the question of what needs to be addressed in the major infrastructural, cultural, and organisational issues if integrated formal and informal eLearning environments are going to affect any change in the institutional regime. It argues that two conceptual models can help address these issues. Firstly, a social media participation model, Aggregate then Curate, was developed on a JISC-funded project, MOSI-ALONG, which was based on an integrated model of formal and informal learning called the Emergent Learning Model. Secondly, a development framework for institutional flexibility called an Organisational Architecture of Participation was developed with UK Further Education colleges to better enable eLearning within educational institutions. Based on reflection on the institutional lessons learnt within MOSI-ALONG and through working with local partners, recommendations are made concerning how to address infrastructural, cultural, and organisational issues to better enable adult eLearning. This includes another, broader, proposal concerning the need for individual adult learning institutions to have ongoing support from hubs if they are to evolve a community-responsive institutional life cycle appropriate for adult learning.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at how adult informal eLearning in the United Kingdom might be better enabled in the future through changes in the institutional regime. It is an admittedly partial view that

draws on a number of projects and research into adult informal eLearning that the authors have been involved in, and also draws on a model of institutional flexibility called the *organisational Architecture of Participation* that was originally derived from business contexts and has since been applied in Further Education colleges. The authors examine what was learnt about developing infor-

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mal eLearning from various projects and research carried out between 2000 and 2003, how this was implemented in more recent projects using social media, such as MOSI-ALONG (2011), and what this, and related learning theories, might tell us about ‘modelling’ informal eLearning.

This research and theory about informal eLearning is then combined with other research into how to make college institutions more eLearning ready, or e-mature, and from this the authors outline what issues need to be addressed if we are to initiate helpful changes in the institutional regime of adult learning. From this the authors outline the opportunities for designing both better adult informal eLearning programmes and also providing better institutional structures, in terms of organisations, culture and infrastructure, to support adult learning in the 21st Century.

THE UK CONTEXT AND INFORMAL ELEARNING

In the UK there have been three great waves of e-enabling learning nationally within the education system. In 1997, secondary schools were connected to a National Grid for Learning, then in 1999 Further Education (FE) Colleges were put onto the Further Education Resources for Learning (FERL) network and from 2000 Adult Learning was e-enabled through the Community Access to Lifelong Learning Initiative (CALL). This latter was the focus of what later became understood as informal eLearning, and ultimately incorporated the People’s Network which e-enabled UK public libraries. It is primarily the research undertaken and work carried out within the CALL initiative that the authors have drawn upon for this chapter concerning informal eLearning. The national funding for universally e-enabling education ended in 2005.

From 2006 onwards there has been a withdrawal of funding for adult learning with funds being steered by UK Governments towards training and

support for improving adult literacy and numeracy, as the UK has one of the poorest records in the OECD countries on adult literacy and numeracy. Despite a restructuring of “community learning” funding (Department of Business Innovation & Skills - BIS, 2011, p. 13), in the UK the focus on adult learning is now on “skills for employment” (Department of Business Innovation & Skills - BIS, 2011, p. 13), rather than acquisition of skills and knowledge through engagement in topics more freely chosen by the learner. Learners have the choice of joining programmes or classes of their choice, but these must now be paid for, restricting access to those with the funds to enable their enrolment in such classes. This has limited how adult learning is currently funded, although many single purpose community centres continue to function on the edge of the education system.

RESEARCHING INFORMAL ELEARNING

The authors, along with other colleagues, starting working on modelling informal eLearning over ten years ago as part of the Metadata for Community Content (MCC) research project at Becta (Kenyon & Hase, 2013). From that work a model of informal eLearning was developed and presented at an invited workshop organised by the Association of Learning Technologists (ALT) & Becta in 2003. The core of that model was that effective informal eLearning allowed socially excluded adult learners to identify and engage in what interested them, rather than working through a prescribed curriculum. This was both based on research into the practice of “informal community eLearning” in UK online centres (Cook & Smith, 2004), and the learning practice therein, identified by an advisory group of experienced community learning practitioners. The research identified that the role of learning support in informal eLearning should be undertaken by what was identified in the research as “trusted intermediaries,” namely

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