

# Chapter 24

## From Memorable to Transformative E–Learning Experiences: Theory and Practice of Experience Design

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter reviews the current state of theory and practice of experience design and suggests that the notion of experience should be regarded as an essential and unifying theme in guiding a broader perspective of design and study of e-learning. Underlying this chapter is a view that suggests a shift from designing learning environments to “staging” learning experiences. By looking at learning through the prism of experience design, we may begin to discover ways to create compelling, memorable, and transformative e-learning experiences. Some existing models and effective practices in education are considered as viable models for adapting experience design to e-learning contexts. Furthermore, this chapter identifies some converging areas of research from the fields of experience design and education, so as not to reinvent the wheel but to expand our knowledge on designing quality e-learning experiences that are engaging and valued by people.*

### INTRODUCTION

In 1999, in an article entitled “*Online Education as Interactive Experience: Some Guiding Models*,” Hilary McLellan asked an important question that should be carefully considered by educators: “All aspects of education are imbued with a high potential for remembrance and nostalgia. But how does this experience change as the experience shifts more

and more from a physical location to cyberspace?” (p. 36). In the article, McLellan discussed some guiding models and concepts for creating engaging and memorable online learning experiences: *experience economy* (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), *digital storytelling*, *social presence*, and *personal space and affordances*. Of particular significance is Pine and Gilmore’s experience economy model that encompasses four realms of experience design: (1) *esthetic* – design that provides an inviting, interesting, and comfortable environment, (2) *es-*

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*capist* – design that focuses on immersive, highly participatory activities, (3) *educational* – design that promotes active learning and exploration, and (4) *entertainment* – design that allows fun and enjoyment for sustaining learner attention and motivation. The four experience realms have important implications for e-learning design. In a later article, McLellan (2002) elaborated on using *experience design* as a framework for designing learning experiences in general. “Experience design is an emerging multidisciplinary approach to design that has important implications for the design of instruction. Experience design is actually an ancient practice, going back to the earliest human impulse to develop rituals, ceremonies, drama, and even architecture. But the design of experiences has become much more pervasive during the past century, with media, including radio, television, and interactive electronic media, playing a central role” (McLellan, 2002, p. 30). Examples of applying experience design in education include museum exhibits, case studies, and simulations that focus on highly interactive and participatory learning experiences.

Now, almost a decade after McLellan’s 1991 article, how has e-learning evolved in terms of experience design? As e-learning is becoming a popular form of learning and training both in corporate and academic settings, many authors have contributed to the discussion of relevant topics. This chapter is an attempt to review the current state of theory and practice of experience design related to e-learning developments. It suggests that the concept of experience should be regarded as an essential and unifying theme in guiding the design and study of e-learning. It then considers some existing models and effective practices in education, including project-based learning (PBL), knowledge building, visual thinking, and cognitive apprenticeship, for creating highly participatory e-learning experiences that are not only memorable but also transformative. The main aims of this chapter are to:

1. Review current state of theory and practice of experience design related to e-learning developments;
2. Explore existing models and effective practices in education as viable models for adapting experience design to e-learning contexts;
3. Identify converging areas of research from the education and experience design fields and suggest directions for future research and development.

## EXPERIENCE DESIGN

The major thrust of the work of Pine and Gilmore is that experience is a new type of economic offering that is distinct from the previous *Service Economy*. “When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages — as in a theatrical play — to engage him in a personal way” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 2). Pine and Gilmore regard every business as a *stage* where the buyers of experiences should be treated as *guests* and the company that engages its guests over a duration of time is comparable to the role of an *experience stager*. They define experiences as “events that engage individuals in a personal way” (p. 12) that could be on various levels: emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual.

Although the value of experience as an economic offering has been mainly exploited by the entertainment industry, Pine and Gilmore (1999) point out that “staging experiences is not about entertaining customers, it’s about *engaging* them” (p. 30). To help design engaging and compelling experiences, they propose an experiential framework (see Figure 1) that encompasses four realms of experiences based on the level of participation (active or passive) and the type of connection (absorption or immersion) one has with the event.

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