



Chapter XV

A Blended Approach Learning Strategy for Teacher Development

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ABSTRACT

In-service upgrading has been an accepted avenue for retraining practicing teachers in Singapore to keep abreast of changing curriculum requirements as well as infusion of information technology (IT) in teaching and learning. To cope with the teachers' busy work schedules and many school commitments, upgrading courses were offered to the teachers primarily asynchronously, using the Internet platform with some integrated synchronous sessions. This chapter analyzes the rationale for the development of such a Web-based teacher-upgrading program and discusses the main issues of professional upgrading addressed in the development. Issues of adult learning in a learner-controlled adaptive learning environment and lifelong learning were addressed through an IT-infused asynchronous mode, providing the much-needed freedom in time management for the course participants. The development also includes delivery of high definition graphics through a customized hybrid system of CD-ROM and Web that addresses image-downloading bottleneck and thereby overcomes a basic problem of distance learning in geospatial education. Finally, reflections on the attending adult learners' responses to such an upgrading program are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Learning through distance education using computer-mediated environment has become not only an accepted norm, but also a necessity in the field of retraining working professionals. As McIssac and Gunawardena (1996) put it, it currently has become the fastest growing form of education. The fast flow of information and the resultant rapid change in all disciplines have made it necessary for continuous upgrading of all professionals. With the workforce engaged in work-related commitments, distance learning using computers has enhanced the learning environment whereby the learners have access to upgrading programs without having to physically go for the courses and yet being in constant contact with the facilitator as well as the other participants. In response to such demands for training and available technological infrastructure, there is a growing trend for blended-approach upgrading courses. One such example of matching the upgrading requirement with the available technology is the teacher training courses offered through the World Wide Web (WWW) to the teachers in Singapore. Singapore's IT thrust started with the effort to integrate information technology in education under the first IT Master Plan in 1997; a corollary to the introduction of IT-infused learning is teacher education and training, not just for the sake of learning IT skills, but also to incorporate IT into their overall training programs. This is where the in-service upgrading programs fit in. Each year, the teachers attend courses in content and pedagogy to keep abreast of the latest developments while still continuing their school commitments. The courses in discussion were a part of such upgrading of teachers and were delivered for content upgrading between 1999 and 2001 via the WWW. This chapter analyzes the rationale for the development of such a Web-based distance teacher retraining program, discusses the strategies adopted to align discipline and training requirements with the available technology, and reflects some on how the Web-based retraining program was used by the participating teachers. The latter reflects to a certain extent on how computer-mediated learning environment influences upgrading of working professionals.

SPECIFICS OF THE SINGAPORE CASE AT HAND

The following excerpt from the Year 2000 Teacher Training Prospectus of the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2000), Singapore, underlines the teacher training initiatives that have been a part of the in-service teacher training scene in Singapore.

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