

Chapter 13

Enabling Creative Blended Learning for Adults through Learning Design

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the emerging need and opportunity for the development the conceptualisation of representation and forms for learning design which are utilised in the activities a teacher plans to engage adult learners in lifelong learning setting. The chapter argues that effective teaching and facilitating practice involving ICT should be described and represented in ways that facilitate creative learning, self-directed learning, critical reflection and experiential learning scenarios. The sharing and reuse of quality ICT-based collaborative learning activities for adults could be a solution to enable creative and effective blended learning for adults. In this chapter Learning Activity Management System (LAMS) is presented as an innovative approach to blended learning paradigm. Inspired by the concept of “Learning Design,” it provides a visual authoring environment for the development of activity sequences, together with a learner run-time environment and a teacher-monitoring environment.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in adult blended learning has dramatically increased within the past five years and for a number of reasons but mainly that most of adults are “time starved” and consequently required greater flexibility balancing work and further education. Today’s adult-learners are more knowledgeable about and comfortable with online communica-

tion. Therefore, learner-centred models of instruction are becoming increasingly more important.

The perceived benefits of blended learning also include the opportunity to learn anytime, anywhere and to communicate and collaborate virtually across countries (Conole & File, 2005). The solution to these seemingly incompatible challenges is often found technological tools such as virtual learning environments (VLEs) for scalable and flexible delivery, and for efficient sharing and reuse of teaching ideas and activities (Falconer & Littlejohn, 2007).

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Blended Learning can be viewed as a mix of teaching and/or facilitation methods, learning styles, resource formats, and technologies into a learning process (scenario) or learning design. The concept of design for extremely short of time learning has arisen as education faces up to the implications of modern pedagogy, student diversity, and the affordances of information and communication technologies. Two of the most salient issues in creative blended learning for adults is firstly the articulation of learning design processes and secondly a shift in attention from a focus on content on to a focus on the process of learning.

Learning design is defined as an application of a pedagogical model for a specific learning objective, target group and a specific context or knowledge domain (Koper & Tattersall, 2005). The learning design specifies the teaching and learning process, along with the conditions under which it occurs and the activities performed by the teachers and learners in order to achieve the required learning objectives.

Contemporary information and communication technologies (ICT) appear to provide support for supplementary into the process of sharing and reusing learning designs. ICT are commonly used in the delivery of adult learning and teaching which offer functionality such as the development, storage and access of reusable and sharable learning designs. The range of ICT-based tools and services available in the learning environment is growing exponentially. In order to provide an interactive learning environment for adults, a combination of advanced integrated learning technologies of synchronous (e.g., videoconferences) and asynchronous learning (e.g., web based learning environments & social networking) is necessary. Despite the plethora of ICT tools and resources available, practitioners are still not making effective use of e-learning to enrich the student experience (Conole & Fill, 2005). A supposed benefit of learning technologies is their potential for providing access to a wealth of knowledge and

tools for students to interact with the knowledge, the teacher and their peers. Yet teachers receive little guidance on how to use these tools to their best effect (Falconer & Littlejohn, 2007). Understanding how these tools may be used effectively to meet the needs of a diverse set of adults and how to make the best use of their potential within a range of learning contexts, should now be part of the skill-set of every teacher or facilitator. Effective teaching and facilitating practice involving ICT should be able to be described and presented in ways that facilitate enabling creative learning, self-directed learning, critical reflection and experiential learning scenarios. The sharing and reuse of quality ICT-based learning setting for adults could be a solution to enable creative and effective blended learning for adults.

“LAMS” is an open source tool for designing, managing and delivering online collaborative learning activities. By using LAMS, teachers gain access to a highly intuitive visual authoring environment for creating sequences of learning activities (Dalziel, 2003). These activities may be individual tasks, small group work or whole class activities. The creation of sequences of learning activities which involve groups of learners interacting within a structured set of collaborative environments, referred to as “learning design”, is less common and LAMS allows teachers to both create and deliver such sequences. LAMS trials indicate it can transform the approach teachers and learners take towards e-learning in both higher educational and lifelong learning contexts. Finding, creating or adapting, suitable learning designs can be both challenging and time consuming. Sharing and adapting effective learning designs for blended learning is both a stimulating and a time-saving.

This chapter examines some of the benefits and issues for teachers in further education and lifelong learning surrounding the idea of learning design and its practical implementation in blended learning. Firstly, it provides a frame for what constitutes adult blended learning. Secondly it

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