Chapter VIII

Networked Collaborative E-Learning

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Abstract

This chapter introduces networked collaborative e-learning as a specific model of e-learning. It argues that any e-learning event or course is underpinned by a set of educational values which determine the design of that event, and that networked collaborative e-learning is underpinned by a belief that e-learning communities and identity formation are central features of this form of learning. The author believes that an understanding of the educational benefits and theoretical constructs of this form of learning will inform our practice of e-learning and point to new areas of research in this new and emerging field.
Overview of the Chapter

This chapter examines a wide-ranging set of issues relating to the effective implementation of networked collaborative e-learning in continuing professional development and adult learning contexts. It aims to show that:

- Our view of learning often determines how we approach any learning and teaching event. Our values and beliefs and the context in which we work define what is important and what is not. This has consequences for the work of organisational trainers and developers.
- We have to actively and consciously design for networked collaborative e-learning. Providing learners with access to the technology does not in itself lead to the technology being used or to learning taking place. There has to be a good reason for learning in this way, and we have to provide well-designed and supportive e-learning environments designed to facilitate effective learning.
- A new paradigm of learning — which I refer to here as networked collaborative e-learning — is emerging as a new model for designing e-learning events.
- At the heart of these changes is a belief that e-learning communities (which can take the form of communities of practice, research communities, and learning communities) and identity formation in these new virtual environments are central features, which need to be considered in order to make them effective and productive places in which to learn.
- A central feature underpinning this view of e-learning is the benefit of collaborative evaluation and assessment in e-learning. When we ask learners to learn collaboratively, we must also ensure they have every opportunity to evaluate their learning in similarly supportive, collaborative contexts.
- In order to attain effective networked collaborative e-learning, it has to be facilitated by teachers and trainers sympathetic to openness in the learning process and who work towards providing an environment supportive of a high degree of self-managed learning.

Networked collaborative e-learning is therefore a form of e-learning that emphasises bringing together learners via personal computers linked to the Internet, with a focus on them working as a “learning community,” sharing resources, knowledge, experience, and responsibility through reciprocal collaborative learning.
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