Chapter VIII

Reusable Resources and Authentic Learning Environments

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Abstract

There is currently a high degree of energy and enthusiasm in the e-learning world being given to developing strategies and systems that support the reuse of digital learning resources. The activity involves a number of processes including the development of specifications and standards for the design and development of reusable learning resources, the storage and access of these resources, and systems for delivering the resources to students. This chapter explores the potential impact this area will have for teachers developing authentic learning environments, and argues the advantages that teachers employing such learning settings will derive from the developments. The chapter suggests design and development strategies that are needed to ensure that potential advantages are realised.
Introduction

Many of the chapters in this book provide detailed descriptions of learning designs which support authentic learning. In most instances, the descriptions of the learning designs describe settings that are strongly supported by digital and online resources. In recent years, the development of online settings has seen a burgeoning of online resources supporting high quality learning experiences and many moves have been taken to create opportunities for the reuse of these resources (e.g., Littlejohn, 2003). The purpose of this chapter is to explore the advantages and opportunities that this activity will bring to teachers and students involved in authentic learning settings.

There are many advantages to be gained from being able to reuse digital resources in learning settings and much has been written on the topic of reusability as both a design and development strategy for online learning materials and as a general approach to the use of digital resources for teaching and learning (e.g., Downes, 2000). The topic necessarily impacts on the actions of the vast majority of people associated with teaching and learning and includes such stakeholders as:

- Administrative and financial bodies that look to benefit from the potential costs savings associated with reusing and sharing learning resources;
- Policy-makers who are interested in the legal and ethical implications of copyright and intellectual property among the shared objects;
- Instructional designers who need to consider design strategies that facilitate and support sharing and reuse; and
- Developers who need to consider appropriate strategies to ensure interoperability and a capability for use of resources beyond the context for which they are designed (e.g., Downes, 2000; Shepherd, 2000).

Apart from the cost savings that stem from reduced development needs, there is also the advantage of being able to provide learners with access to increased levels of resources. When there are ample reusable resources, teachers can select from among those available to choose the most appropriate and the best quality. Reusable resources facilitate the sharing of materials among and between groups, an activity that can only lead to improved outcomes in terms of providing alternative perspectives and a multiplicity of content sources.