Chapter IV

The Interplay of Teaching Conceptions and Course Management System Design: Research Implications and Creative Innovations for Future Designs

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Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationship between instructors’ conceptions of teaching and the design and use of course management systems in instruction. Understanding this relationship helps us to understand why instructors are using course management systems in the ways they do. Subsequently, we can use our understanding
to help define what future generations of course management systems look like and how we as instructors might use them.

**Introduction**

*Remembering that we shape our tools and our tools shape us underscores the need for being proactive and thoughtful about the design of these tools.* (Boettcher, 2003, Future CMSes, ¶1)

Course management systems (CMS) are promoted as an easy way for higher education faculty to integrate technology into their instruction. Along with the claims of cost savings and administrative efficiency (Cohn & Stoehr, 2003), proponents of CMS suggest that they can be used to create student-centered learning environments that actively engage students in learning. These learning environments are purported to provide students with opportunities to experience “deeper learning”, or learning where the outcome is meaningful understanding of material and content (Carmean & Haefner, 2002). The emphasis in a student-centered learning environment is on helping students construct personal meaning and draw connections between new knowledge and existing conceptions and understandings (Hannafin & Land, 1997), while deeper learning environments are characterized as being social, active, contextual, engaging, and student-owned (Carmean & Haefner, 2002). While CMS have the potential to be used to create opportunities for deeper learning, decisions related to the best use of the tools within a course are often left in the hands of the individual instructor (McCray, 2000). Unfortunately, research suggests that CMS are typically not used in ways consistent with deeper learning principles, but rather are primarily used as a means of information dissemination (Oliver, 2001). Research on conceptions of teaching can help us understand why the potential of CMS for creating deep learning environments has yet to be realized extensively in higher education today, while also helping us begin to imagine what future generations of CMS should look like.