Chapter X

Over the Rainbow: Waking up in Tomorrow’s OZ

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Abstract

Next generation course management systems must represent a convergence of the needs and perspectives of all of those who are engaged in the teaching and learning experience. To represent these points of view, we imagine one scenario in which four roles are enacted: instructional designer, traditional student, non-traditional student, and faculty member. This chapter draws on research and theory to illustrate the convergence between content-, learning-, and knowledge-management systems as well as processes managed by both learner and instructor.
Introduction

We might compare the current reality and future vision of course management systems (CMS) to Dorothy and her band of needy sojourners in the Wizard of Oz (Baum, 1900) who each believed that all of the solutions to their problems would be solved effortlessly, with a responsive and individually tailored wave of a wand. What the determined bunch found out, of course, was that no matter what they thought was going to work, there were plenty of detours and barriers along the way to reaching the wonderful wizard (who wasn’t quite what he was promised to be). Their reality more closely resembles early 21st-century CMS with workarounds and “widgets,” generic fixes, and, typically, a belief that there is no better place that the traditional classroom “home.”

Thomas (1994) believes there is an interactive relationship between technological determinism1 and organizational choice of how systems are valued and used, as well as how these systems relate to processes of change. He argues that to effect institutional or organizational change, the process of designing and implementing new technology must change. CMS are typically forced into institutions with little or no engagement of the end user (student or instructor). We contend that it is the responsibility of the end user to design the journey and be active, not just in getting on the road to Oz, but also in making sure that what is over the rainbow, stated in needs and desired outcomes, are clearly articulated so that engineers, software designers vendors, and higher-education decision makers can make informed decisions about how CMS are designed and operate.

So how do we decide what a next-generation course management system should look like and function to best support learning? The EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI), formerly known as National Learning Infrastructure Initiative (NLII), has provided us with a conceptual framework that should guide the design of functionality and the teaching and learning situated within the system. Our goal in this chapter is to relate theory to function. The CMS community of developers and users needs more than functions that serve as information communication technologies (ICT); they also require illustrations of situations that exist today but exemplify what learning in the 21st century will look like. For instance, we believe that lifelong learning cannot be restricted by or confined to a course “receptacle,” and transfer of learning is more likely to occur through experiences in which learners deal with more complex content requiring them not only to relate theory to practical application, but to also make connections among courses taken over their academic experience.
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