Chapter VIII

Envisioning Potential: Stories of Networked Learning Designs from a UK University

Frances Deepwell
Coventry University, UK

Kathy Courtney
Coventry University, UK

Abstract

In this chapter, we explore how the design of networked learning can contribute to building a shared understanding of the applications of new technologies. We draw on our own experiences of the managed introduction of a virtual learning environment (VLE) in a higher education institution and apply techniques of narrative inquiry to aid our understanding. We have explored narrative accounts from different stakeholders in terms of an overarching theme of “building shared understandings”, which we have organised around three areas of our experience, namely designing for a community, developing a discourse, and developing artefacts. We argue that design decisions in these three areas have been highly significant in terms of the levels of acceptance and future direction of an online learning implementation.
Introduction

The chapter explores the ways in which new understandings of the potential of technologies in higher education may be developed and shared within communities within an organisation. As well as emphasising the importance of community-building in a networked learning implementation, a particular focus of the chapter is the way in which the design of artefacts and processes can enable these shared understandings of new technologies to spread within a complex organisational context. The chapter is based on the authors’ experiences in implementing a university-wide strategy of rolling out a Web-based learning environment. Both authors are educational developers with a special interest in learning technologies.

We consider how new understandings emerge through changing discourse, practice, and beliefs within an organisational community and beyond. We draw on Wenger’s theory of a community of practice, in particular the facilities of engagement, imagination, and alignment (Wenger, 1998) as a useful way of conceptualising pedagogical and cultural processes and the role of artefacts as mechanisms for understanding. The discussion will centre around the following questions:

What are the benefits of involving communities of practice in designing for networked learning?
How can we enable conversations to develop around virtual design issues?
What artefacts might be useful in developing shared understandings of the potential of networked learning?

On Methodology and Method

The data that informs this chapter was collected as part of the EU project EQUEL (EQUEL, 2004). The EQUEL project brought together European researchers and practitioners to collaborate in research into aspects of e-learning. The present authors collaborated in a special interest group within the EQUEL project that sought to “bring together European research on the implementation of e-learning from an institutional perspective” (EQUEL, 2004).

The research from our own institution was action research into the management of change as the VLE was implemented across the organisation. This approach to research enabled us to involve colleagues in engaging with the processes of change as a collaborative venture, which in turn helped them “to raise their own awareness of the significance of what they are doing as a form of social change, and have confidence in its legitimacy and importance” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). In our
Related Content

A Framework to Measure and Estimate Video Quality in SVC Real-Time Adaptive Systems

An Immune Systems Approach for Classifying Mobile Phone Usage
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/immune-systems-approach-classifying-mobile/28726?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/immune-systems-approach-classifying-mobile/28726?camid=4v1a)

Exploring SMEs Adoption of Broadband in the Northwest of England
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/exploring-smes-adoption-broadband-northwest/20459?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/exploring-smes-adoption-broadband-northwest/20459?camid=4v1a)
Formal Modeling and Analysis of Object Oriented Systems using Triple Graph Grammars
www.igi-global.com/article/formal-modeling-and-analysis-of-object-oriented-systems-using-triple-graph-grammars/168516?camid=4v1a