

## **Implementing Effective Learning Designs – An ALTC supported project**

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The expansion, restructuring and refinancing of the Higher Education sector in recent years has meant that classes are not only larger but quite diversified in terms of student ability, motivation and cultural background (Biggs, 2003). This change has created an atmosphere where some lecturers are rethinking their teaching approaches and are seeking out what is known about facilitating effective learning. This is the challenge this project addressed by implementing learning design scaffolds, ie, a learning activity planning tool.

Learning design for the higher education environment is a complex task, especially in light of the increasing diversity of the student body. Learning materials need to be designed to take advantage of different student ability levels, learning approaches & media, and curriculum developed to support a huge variety of outcomes that are often discipline specific. Learning design is a professional activity for which many of our academic staff is not trained. In this project we implemented a learning activity planning tool that provided comprehensive guidance for academics to assist them in the development of inspiring learning design examples and supportive activities.

This project initially explored the issues to emerge from the implementation of learning designs and identified the barriers to their widespread adoption and ways of overcoming them. These findings then underpinned the implementation of a learning activity planning tool that addressed these adoption challenges in its design and streamlines the lesson planning process.

The following questions were addressed by this study:

- What learning designs can be readily adopted by particular disciplines as templates for best practice?
- What pedagogical issues emerge from the implementation of learning designs in particular contexts?
- How can identified barriers to academics' adoption, adaptation and reuse of learning designs be overcome?
- How can the adoption of effective learning designs be facilitated by the use of supports and scaffolds, such as, a learning activity planning tool?

Methods triangulate both quantitative and qualitative data and spanned 7 universities. A literature review was conducted to form a sound theoretical basis for the research. A detailed mapping and analysis of current models was undertaken and workshops will be run with an inter-disciplinary expert working panel to establish best practice.

The software for the planning tool has been tested and is now considered quite stable. Key members of the project team have gradually refined the template to a point where a basic structure for adding new exemplar learning design templates has been developed. The software is currently being trialled by 93 different users from 9 countries.

The project combined face-to-face workshops for training and sharing of experiences with an online community incorporating discussion forums and will utilise a number of existing repositories (eg. Carrick Exchange, Technology-Supported Learning Database and LAMS Community). An initial successful presentation and workshop at a conference in Cadiz, Spain in July 2008 was followed up by an international Learning Design conference at Macquarie University and a 3 day meeting in December at Sydney University which involved discussions about a variety of related approaches to the problems being addressed by this project. This community has continued to meet, most recently in July, 2009 in the UK, further consolidating the strong affiliations with Oxford, London Knowledge Lab, and the UK Open University. Most importantly, the number of interested parties continues to grow, most recently with a delegation from Greece.

All pilot testing to date has involved only small groups of lecturers and students. However, their feedback has been instrumental in how the Planner interface was designed and how the content was displayed. Evaluation has resulted in a number of interface improvements. Additionally, extensive peer review has been undertaken by our Reference Group and academics well regarded in the field of Learning Design at both a national and international level. The project's concepts, premises, methods and early prototypes have been evaluated by researchers from around the world – many of whom are working on similar projects. This feedback has already been employed to make some changes in methodology and approach to the finalisation of the literature review. An external evaluator will be employed in the next stage to formally evaluate the project.

Stage 2 testing will involve larger numbers of students in whole class groups across several disciplines and, as per project timeline.

The community also continues to grow by word of mouth and a video presentation has been prepared so that those who cannot be present at a face-to-face presentation or workshop can learn about the Planner. Any enquiries of this nature are referred to: <http://wiki.lamsfoundation.org/display/planner/Activity+Planner> This page also includes an 8 minute video that outlines many of the features of the current Planner.

The framework will continue to be refined as the data from the Phase 2 pilot is analysed. Currently the framework is evolving as feedback is received from exemplar demonstrations to the Project Team, Advisors and students.

Further information will be uploaded to this website as results come in. The researchers are happy to answer any questions you may have via email on the addresses below:

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