Chapter 2.15
Strategic Design for Web–Based Teaching and Learning:
Making Corporate Technololgy Systems Work for the Learning Organization

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ABSTRACT

Deakin University has established and integrated a major, corporate technology infrastructure to unify and enhance its on-campus and distance education. This environment is called Deakin Online. Efforts to realize its potential for creating enduring teaching and learning benefits are understood in the context of the University's commitment to "relevance, responsiveness and innovation." How are these values and benefits realized in an evolving, educational enterprise using the new digital, corporate technologies and new concepts of organizational structure and function? We argue for the transforming influence of a new academic teacher role, new forms of academic development and open collegiality. Moreover, changes in role and process need to be grounded in systemic, organization-wide and program-wide approaches to designing and working within comprehensively conceived, contemporary learning environments. We argue for system-wide education design, situating e-learning within broader curricular and pedagogical concerns to create enduring benefits in the learning environments of higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Deakin University, as with so many other universities nationally and internationally, has established in the last 5 years an institution-wide approach to enhancing its distance education and on-campus education through networked, Web-based technologies. The establishment of the Deakin Online campus, supported by a suite of integrated corporate technologies, has been progressively implemented over this time. There has been a much needed focus on putting in place the necessary corporate infrastructure requiring the acquisition, deployment and development of an institutional gateway, portal, learning management system (LMS), content management system, synchronous communication system, and streamed audio and video solutions. The drive to establish the infrastructure was based on a range of educational, competitive advantage, cost, commercial and legal concerns. Various institutional stakeholders have different legitimate needs and interests in supporting the various component technologies constituting the University's enterprise-level solution.

With so many technology developments, so many interests and so many possible benefits to be obtained through this large organizational investment, it can be easy to lose sight of the particular perspectives of the University's most significant constituency—academic teaching staff and their students. The focus can inadvertently be on products and short-term training needs. While necessary, this is not a sufficient condition for maximizing corporate technology potentials, and such a focus holds all of the attendant dangers of what we have called "product centricism" (Corbitt, Holt, & Segrave, 2004). As with many universities now in a similar position, the enduring teaching and learning value anticipated from an investment in corporate technologies must be realized, but realized in a Deakin way for Deakin staff and Deakin students. This represents a critical challenge to universities. It requires ongoing significant change in the role of the academic teacher, while still recognizing the centrality and criticality of the role. Academic teachers' agency—vis-a-vis other internal and external parties with a stake in educating their students—must still be respected. In this chapter, we argue that new forms of academic collegiality are required, and that institutions, which are able to cultivate such powerful forms of engagement, will excel in designing quality learning environments and therefore differentiate themselves in the market. Such differentiation does not result from the procurement of technology infrastructure alone. Moreover, these forms need to be open to the contributions of others and based on broader systemic, programmatic concerns.

Designing for the new learning environments requires a student-centered, learning outcomes approach that sees programs of study as coherent, integrated educational experiences. Therefore, we argue that a new form of education design thinking is also required as a basis for curriculum review and renewal, and appropriate forms of professional development. This strategic education design enterprise requires *expansive, peripheral curriculum design,* where a Web of interconnections can be mapped within and across units, year levels, programs of study and faculty/school offerings in the areas of generic student attributes, assessment strategies, and the use of various media and technologies. We believe that a systems-based education design approach is the key to help unlock the teaching and learning value of the corporate technologies for universities. It is both in philosophy and process, we believe, a critical orientation for the university as a *learning organization* wishing to continuously improve its collective learning and performance in the new digital knowledge era.

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