Chapter VII
Blending Collaborative Online Learning with Workplace and Community Contexts

Peter J. Smith
Deakin University, Australia

Elizabeth Stacey
Deakin University, Australia

Tak Shing Ha
University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

The majority of research and literature in collaborative learning online has been focussed on groups of students organised into units of study by an educational institution. There are, however, large numbers of adult students for whom participation in institutionally controlled online collaborative learning occurs side by side with participation in situated learning contexts such as their work or their community. This chapter draws on research conducted by the authors with adult learners who participate in communities of practice and communities of learning in their own work or life contexts, and provides insights into how these outside-institution learning environments can be used in a more deliberate blending to enhance student learning experience.

INTRODUCTION

Although there has been considerable focus on blended learning in reasonably formal institutional settings, our interest here is in blended learning as an effective tool outside just the confines of institutional learning. Blended learning, usually defined as a mix of face-to-face instruction and learning experiences provided online (Graham, 2006) has, in the formal institutional setting, fo-

cussed largely on learning within the community established by the institution. Most commonly, that community comprises fellow students of that same institution and probably even of the same unit of study, and the relevant instructors. Our contention here is that this is a crucially important form of blended learning that is likely to become even more effective as social software sophistication increases, and the ways in which that software is used by students and their instructors similarly increases. However, our contention is also that, for adult learners out in the busy workplace, there are other communities that they use for learning that are as rich as those to be found in institutional settings. As Baldwin-Evans (2006, p.156) has observed, for adult learners in the workplace most learning 'takes place informally outside the boxes on the organization chart'. It is the potential for drawing on the power of these informal learning communities that has interested us before (eg Stacey, Smith & Barty, 2004, Stacey, Barty & Smith, 2005). In this chapter we will explore this blending of the learning communities with workplace communities, and discuss the interaction that can occur as we extend our definition of blended learning to include this phenomenon.

The field of online learning has begun to be described increasingly by a range of commentators and researchers in terms of community as a way of explaining the cognitive and affective inter-relationships that students develop online. Researchers have explored the nature of online communities from Rheingold's (1992) *virtual community* of people linked by the internet, computer mediation and shared interests to the more purposeful educational *community of inquiry* defined by Garrison and Anderson (2003) and re-purposed for blended learning by Garrison and Vaughan (2008). Within institutional settings, particularly in higher education, there has been a great deal of discussion focussing on learning communities (McLoughin 2001; Tu Corry 2001; Chapman, Ramondt, & Smiley 2005). In a context of distance education, computer mediated com-

munication (CMC) has provided the capacity to develop a community of learning among groups of learners who are geographically or temporally distributed, and who would not otherwise have opportunity for the collaborative experience that is afforded online. These new types of online learning communities have begun to be researched extensively but discussions of virtual communities, communities of learners and communities of practice appear in the literature without always a common understanding of the parameters of these communities (Tiwana & Bush 2001; Brook & Oliver 2003).

The similarities of variables for study in such communities of learning to the factors studied in the body of research into computer supported collaborative learning include cognitive negotiation of meaning, social support and establishing of social presence, engagement in CMC support systems (Stacey, 1999, 2002). This research has provided those researching the higher education sector with a basis for framing a study of the intersection of communities of practice and communities of learning. Most postgraduate students are workplace-based students and those studying at a distance who engage in learning online do so because it provides them with flexibility of access to a community of learning without their having to physically travel from their workplaces or homes. They can develop online communities of learning which may be short term for one part of a semester or longer term over a course. Research is beginning to be developed that follows the establishment of their communities (Preece, Abras & Maloney-Krichmar, 2004; Wilson, Ludwig-Hardman, Thornam & Dunlap, 2004; Goodfellow 2005) and their negotiated meaning and processes for integrating newcomers and old-timers in such a virtual community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The development of such communities has mainly been explored through researching teaching strategies in online environments and the notion of the online community of learning within communities of

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/blending-collaborative-online-learning-workplace/9191

Related Content

Managing and Facilitating Student Learning in Teams in Higher Education
Uwe Matthias Richter, Sarada Veerabhatlaand Larysa Zasiekina (2021). *Cases on Active Blended Learning in Higher Education (pp. 149-171).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/managing-and-facilitating-student-learning-in-teams-in-higher-education/275678

Designing Participant-Generated Context into Guided Tours
Juliet Sprake (2011). *Combining E-Learning and M-Learning: New Applications of Blended Educational Resources (pp. 92-107).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/designing-participant-generated-context-into/52375

Understanding Student Learning Behavior and Predicting Their Performance
Muhammad Wasif, Hajra Waheed, Naif R. Aljohaniand Saeed-Ul Hassan (2019). *Cognitive Computing in Technology-Enhanced Learning (pp. 1-28).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/understanding-student-learning-behavior-and-predicting-their-performance/228488

Engaging Students with Mobile Technologies to Support Their Formal and Informal Learning
Melanie Ciussi, Gill Rosnerand Marc Augier (2009). *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning (pp. 84-98).*
www.irma-international.org/article/engaging-students-mobile-technologies-support/37554

The Effectiveness of Self-Directed English Learning through SNS: Adopting Facebook based on Gamification
Eun-Sok Wonand Jeong-Ryeol Kim (2018). *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning (pp. 1-10).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-effectiveness-of-self-directed-english-learning-through-sns/205559