**On the Fly? or On the Web?**  
*Working Paper*  
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**Background**

Earlier in 1999, the Faculty of Education nominated as its Lead Site Activity, under the banner of the Learning and Teaching Operational Plan (LTOP), an innovative undergraduate program, the Bachelor of Adult Learning and Development (BAL&D) titled *The development of a flexibly delivered innovative undergraduate program that supports lifelong learning and engagement amongst mature-age experienced adult professionals*.

The BAL&D program, is a new program for the Faculty of Education, and is aimed at people who are working with adult learners in various settings, including private, industry and community organisations, and TAFE institutes. The BAL&D program therefore recognises that its students will be mature-age and come from a variety of backgrounds. In essence, do not fit the stereotypical student profile. In response to this, the program is based on adult learning theories and flexible teaching and learning modes, to maximise the learning opportunities of the mature-age participants.

**Project Goals**

The aims of the lead site project are:

1. To develop a model of flexible learning that integrates intensive face-to-face teaching with the appropriate use of technology in order to maximise lifelong learning opportunities and the development of students' capacities for self-directed learning
2. To design web-based materials that complement the objectives of the Bachelor for Learning and Development
3. To implement these materials in semester 1, year 2000, with a view to evaluating the desirability and feasibility of this model of flexible learning.

The project will contribute towards the Learning and Teaching Operational Plan by improving the curriculum, student learning and the teaching environment. It is also anticipated that it will assist in demonstrating that flexibly delivered programs are beneficial to students and teachers that include educational technology.

**Project Implementation**

The project commenced in late July 99, with a project officer appointed for nine months, to support program design, development and evaluation with the Adult Vocational Education and Training (AVET) department. The project's interpretation of Flexible Learning will be based on the definition as described in the Flexible Learning Guide, Number one, developed by the Centre for Higher Education Development (Murphy, Jamieson, & Webster, 1998).

**Project Issues**

The following issues will be discussed in relation to flexibly delivered education programs development. First, documentation of the processes used and the accompanying thinking often doesn't get done. Also, the why s of decisions are not explained, for example, what were the underlying educational theories, beliefs and assumptions? A second issue is around the notion of the development and sharing of the tools that support educational web sites. In relation to their costs and their ability to be reproduced and used over and over to reduce costs,(Laurillard, 1999a; Laurillard, 1999b). The third issue is in relation to how educators work. Moore and Kearsley (1996) foresee that the biggest challenge for education today is the development of a total systems approach where resources are distributed, and educators are trained to work as specialists within such as system. For the educator, this means moving from the "craft" of teaching where the educator...
known for their high global profile and a speciality, they will write support materials for those that are (Tsichritzis, 1999).

A fourth issue that is common place in the information technology (IT) industry, but only beginning to surface in education, is the tension between what guides the end product. Is it the back-end technology, the administration funding, the front-end human-interface designers or instructional designers. It is common to observe that a product that states that it has been designed for human use often fails to be useful (Norman, 1998). Lastly, it is about assisting the majority of the student population to learn relatively easily and successfully (Casey, 1998).

**Project Strategies and Processes**
The issues described above can be best addressed with two major guiding approaches, *instructional systems design* (ISD) and *project management* (PM). The following is a brief discussion on why these approaches were chosen.

**Instructional Systems Design**
The ISD approach acknowledges the human relationship between learners, educators, materials and goals (Driscoll, 1998; Seels & Glasgow, 1998). ISD emphasises the processes of design, and the premise that learning is best developed with systematic planning, explicit goals and outcomes. The ISD process is versatile. It can be used to develop small one-hour presentations to whole courses and systems of learning, in a range of settings and industries. The ISD process is distinctive because of its ability to distil and so determine the nature and scope of the learning requirements. Further, ISD is based on a generic instructional design model and (simplified) includes five distinct phases: analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation. The application of this model emphasises thorough analysis and planning, and so reduces the reliance on intuition or trial-and-error planning. This model also encourages documentation and audit trails, whereby decisions made during the process can be evaluated and examined reliably and retrospectively. The application of an ISD approach also allows proper planning and forecasting of the costs, resources and time, and so can prevent the massive cost escalations and under-estimation of time, common to many projects. This is crucial when expensive technology for learning is included. Another twist on this theme, and the necessity for ISD is the requirement for sufficient detail (blue-print) for developers work from. The lack of may mean something else is developed instead! Or, the client or learner may realise what they do want towards the end of the project, because elements such as storyboarding or prototyping have not taken place earlier. Expensive add-ons or modifications to the product then occurs at a stage when too much work has gone before and changes and repairs to the overall system have to be made (Wysocki, Beck, & Crane, 1995).

**Project Management**
Projects are dynamic systems that need containment and management. PM brings a discipline into the achievement of complex deliverables or goals. The discipline of PM implants time frames and milestones, chunking of tasks and specifications in a manageable way (Wysocki et al., 1995). It is also worth noting that PM includes the notion of teamwork. In this case, the educator in order to deliver course content flexibly, will be required to work cooperatively with a team of educational and technical developers. PM does not go unmentioned in the text books that describe the how to s of using computer technology in education. PM is discussed by leading experts in the field, such as Bates (1995), Driscoll (1998) and Seels & Glasgow (1998). One of the world s leading authorities on web site development and web graphic design David Seigel (1997 & 1999) strongly advocates the use of project management. Seigel s main argument is in the use of partnerships. Siegel asserts that a partnership is required so that project management goals are met for the client and a web site is built that works for the customers. This guiding principle could also be used in the education field and read the learner and educator work together to design a project plan that works for the educator, and a web site that works for the learner.

It is predicted that ISD and PM approaches can address the tension of what guides the end product or set of deliverables. Both approaches include analysis and design phases. It is during these
In conclusion, fundamentally programs in education are aimed at and designed for learners and learning. The mode of delivery should not change that. The use of sound project management and instructional design principles when designing for complex situations, such as flexible learning, will promote that aim.

References


