

Title: Universities' Collaboration in eLearning (UCeL): Post-Fordism in action

Dawn Leeder & Raquel Morales
Universities' Collaboration in eLearning
University of Cambridge
UK
dawn@ucel.ac.uk

Submission category: Brief paper

Theme: Project Opportunities

Demonstration: The presentation will commence with a demonstration of a reusable learning object (RLO) and an overview of its features.

Examples of how it was created and the tools and templates used to produce it will be shown in the presentation

Abstract: The worlds of work and learning are changing; have already changed. Flexibility and transferability, always desirable attributes in the effective employee and the diligent student, are now becoming necessary qualities of learning materials. Focusing on the processes, tools, templates and methods that drive this post-Fordist production line to enable effective learning and quality teaching time, this paper introduces the UCeL collective and offers it as a model of a successful community of practice developing, sharing and evaluating high quality interactive eLearning content in the form of reusable learning objects (RLOs).

UCeL is a collaboration between 6 major UK universities. Led by its Cambridge hub, the partners are the Universities of Nottingham, Manchester, East Anglia (Norwich) and Wolverhampton with Peninsula Medical School (Exeter/Plymouth). The collective encompasses Schools of Nursing and Midwifery, Medicine, Health, Public Health and Social Care. The model of collaborative content creation is a compelling and convincing one and, being broadly generalisable, has already generated interest from a number of other subject areas outside of the health-professional education arena in which it first was initiated.

Interactive multimedia is both expensive and labour-intensive to create, so it makes sense to share the burden and the cost. The same topics are being taught across multiple institutions and within many departments which means that duplication of effort is taking place: if generic and reusable resources could be identified and produced, much time and effort could be spared. Rather than try to replace teachers with complete distance learning packages, the production and sharing of flexible and reusable learning objects, focusing on the repetitive teaching tasks, can enable them to work smarter and more effectively and have more meaningful interactions with their students. eLearning is thus integrated holistically into the learning mix and is no longer perceived as an external entity. By encouraging and engaging educators in the creation and production processes, a sense of

collective ownership is engendered, reusability is enhanced and individual subject expertise is valued by the entire community.

To achieve this, UCeL has pioneered innovative ways of unlocking content and distributed post-Fordist production processes. In the first instance, the RLO must be visualised and described as its shape must be known and recognised in order to make it. UCeL has defined a RLO for its own pragmatic purposes; not to suggest that this is the only form, but simply one of many possible formats, which is in itself evolving. Expert content is unlocked using a specially designed template that allows teachers to organise their subject matter into a format appropriate for RLO development. Hands-on, creative workshops and intensive residential training weeks stimulate interest and offer many opportunities for re-skilling and personal development as well as social interactions. The former one day workshops immerse educators in content creation and the latter week-long programmes are aimed at 'skilling-up' developers as well as sharing tips, tricks and developing content. A two-stage peer review process ensures quality, both of the written specification and then the completed online resource. Media ingredients (such as images, animations, video and audio clips) are assembled and dispatched electronically. All these practical activities coupled with rigorous quality assurance methods of peer review and evaluation feeding back into the development lifecycle, make it possible for a range of quality learning objects is being produced and evaluated in practice.

Choice of topic for transforming into RLO format is also crucial to ensure reusability and UCeL has identified a range of suitable topics: Statistics, Research methods, Anatomy and Physiology & Epidemiology. These are all, arguably, essential for successful evidence-based practice in health care. Equally important to maximise uptake is open-source tools and templates and these are all available as downloadable resources from the UCeL website.

This paper explicates the processes with examples from successful practice, with a discussion of the methods, tools and templates that have been developed to enable each stage and concludes with a "how to" checklist for others wishing to commence a similar initiative.

References:

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