Going Global: Considerations and Challenges in Designing a 'Global' MBA

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Abstract

Addressing the theme of globalisation and interculturality in networked learning, this poster focuses on the development of a 'Global' MBA programme at the Open University Business School (UK), which replaces its existing programme, starting 2010. The poster presents an in-depth reflective account of the process of redesigning the first (foundation) course in this programme, highlighting the challenges encountered during the design process in areas of technology, delivery, support, pedagogy and organisational culture. It presents the important questions addressed by the design team, the team's responses and some of the ways forward considered in the process of developing a primarily on-line model with potential global reach. This work is underpinned by the assumption that the face of distance education is rapidly changing. Online courses that were designed with a view of the Web as primarily a repository of learning resources and a platform for online lectures are giving way to new models of teaching and learning that build on the educational potential of Web 2.0 and other emerging technologies (Anderson 2008). We argue that processes of globalisation both call for and support changes in the ethos of distance education from being primarily focused on delivering content to learners to enabling satisfying cross-cultural learning experiences that necessitate changes to modes of working and collaborating at various levels. This poster therefore presents and explores both barriers to and opportunities for innovation encountered in designing one such course, but which may have wider relevance to the design of technology-enhanced learning experiences in other settings and contexts.

Key words:
 Globalisation, cross-cultural exchange, learning design, online MBA

Aims and objectives

This reflective research aims to share, discuss and theoretically frame assumptions, difficulties and solutions involved in producing a primarily on-line course for a global context, thus adding to a developing understanding of the nature and challenges of globalisation and interculturality in networked learning.

Research Context

Established in 1983, The Open University Business School (OUBS) is Europe's largest business school in terms of student numbers and is one of the largest providers of business education in the world. Outside the UK and Western Europe, distance teaching and learning have been mainly organised through partner institutions and partnership agreements. The development of a 'Global' MBA programme both builds on and questions existing models and structures.

Design and preliminary findings

The experience of course design to date has raised a number of issues namely:

   a) Challenges of structuring online content and activities
   b) Challenges of 'glocalising' course delivery
   c) Challenges of selecting appropriate technologies (considering the 'digital divide')
   d) Challenges of adapting social and institutional processes to new ways of working

The following discussion is indicative of the issues encountered and responses considered.

Moving the course online involves not only the process of making online resources available on the Web, but also of designing and structuring the course activities in relation to the online content which embeds resources in online narrative. Such a design challenges the traditional procedures and nature of academic writing processes in relation to course design and production (Jochems et al 2004, Salomon 2005).

It is important to ensure that the nature of the student learning experience is relevant to the students' professional practice in culturally diverse contexts and that there are features within this experience that make it equivalent to MBA-level studies across the various settings where the programme will be delivered. The role of locally based tutors in mediating student learning is crucial, and the emerging online model provides new opportunities for tutors to engage with students both locally and across the programme.

Emergent learning technologies should make it possible to deliver the course in, and enable the involvement of students from, a wide variety of contexts. However, the way these technologies are used might differ in different cultural contexts. Cultural issues may question the use of some activities (producing collaborative work or critiquing each other's work), and the added value of technology-mediated collaborative and group work might not be obvious to students in countries with different educational traditions (Yang et al. 2008).

In the production process, prominence has therefore been given to issues of learning design, usability and the student experience, involving a specialist learning design team in addition to course authors. However, it has also become clear that participation is also needed from a wider group of stakeholders, including existing students, alumni and the wider tutor base, to draw on all available (international) resources and expertise,. Their participation in the course production process through the use of blogs and development activities has emerged as important in building capacity and drawing on invaluable 'global' experience.

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