

OLTD 502 – The Digital Learning Continuum

Reflection #1 – Create a sense of community in a digital environment for adult learners

Program learning outcome(s):

- Become familiar with common terms, definitions, and elements related to blended and online learning environments.
- Demonstrate basic competency with design and implementation within blended and online learning environments.
- Plan learning opportunities suitable to the strengths and challenges of blended and online learning environments.
- Develop and design intentional learning activities suitable for the learning environment and the learner
 - Incorporation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles; and
 - Selection of strategies and resources appropriate for the learning environment, learners, and learning outcomes.
- Create assessment and evaluation methods and tools suitable to the strengths and challenges of blended and online learning environments.
- Integrate current cognitive learning and change management theory
- Examine current research on emerging practices for blended and online learning environments.
- Develop practical and technical skills in all phases of concept, development, design, implementation, etc. for blended and online learning environments.
- Develop skills to optimize learning experiences through personalization based on characteristics, needs, stages of development, current personalized learning mandates, and misconceptions.
- Continue from OLTD Program
 - Engage in learning communities and communities of practice.
 - Critically assess and evaluate resources for best practice in online learning.
 - Consider responsibility, accountability, and civility in online environments.
 - Continue evidence and reflection collection in an ePortfolio template to demonstrate course and program mastery.
 - Maintain a personal web space to support your learning throughout the OLTD program.

Evidence:

The evidence that I chose is a paper that I wrote entitled, "Create a sense of community in a digital environment for adult learners". This was the major project that I selected for the course. I chose to incorporate the EXTEND Curator and Collaborator project(s) that I selected to compliment this paper.

My learnings:

I initially began this project thinking that I would assess online tools that were used during the pandemic to support adult learning programs. I quickly found out that there is not a lot of current research in this area. Instead, I ended up focusing on the following elements:

As an adult educator one way to foster a sense of belonging is through intentional social presence activities such as the digital moment research that was conducted by Barber (2020). In OLTD 501 I summarized the Community of Inquiry framework presences as:

- Social presence - as it is important for developing relationships, especially in a virtual environment,

- Cognitive presence - for problem-based learning, and
- Teacher presence - as the facilitator is a “guide on the side” not a “sage on the stage” (King, 1993) as the program is learner-centered not teacher-centered.

Another way is to encourage informal communities of practice as described by Farnsworth et al. (2016) as a means for learners to gather during a course, and after it is completed.

Through the EXTEND Curator badge activity I can honestly say that I have a much better understanding of how-to curate information that is valid, current, open sourced, and licensed. This information will be important for my studies at VIU and through my professional practice

The EXTEND Collaborator badge social experiment was somewhat successful, although it did not increase my network at all, it helped validate the tools that I was thinking that I would use in the future for social connectedness and to develop a sense of belonging.

Why is this important and meaningful to my practice?

Through the journey of writing this paper, and completing the activities for the EXTEND badges, I discovered what I intrinsically already knew: adult learners vary and want different degrees of social connectivity. However, this research will improve my practice as a facilitator, as I will incorporate Barber’s “digital moments” so people can get to know each other better and develop a sense of trust.

Through the social experiment that I conducted for the EXTEND Collaborator badge described in Appendix B, I may encourage, depending again on the group, the use of an informal community of practice. This microblogging tool, as described by Bates (2014) and Kind & Evans (2015), can be through one of the social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Slack, or Instagram). I could incorporate the use of a social platform (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Slack, or something else) to get people used to connecting with each other throughout the courses. If they wish to continue after the course is finished, they can create their own private group to carry on.

Sources:

Barber, W., 2020. Building creative critical online learning communities through digital moments. The Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 18(5), pp. 387-396.

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Kind, T., & Evans, Y. (2015). Social media for lifelong learning. International Review of Psychiatry 27(2), 124-132. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09540261.2014.990421>

Farnsworth, V., Kleanthous, I., & Wenger-Trayner, E. (2016). Communities of practice as a social theory of learning: A conversation with Etienne Wenger. British Journal of Educational Studies, 64:2, 139-160, <https://www-tandfonlinecom.ezproxy.viu.ca/doi/pdf/10.1080/00071005.2015.1133799?needAccess=true>