



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

Effective practice for e-learning

Designing for professional development

How do we design effective professional development?

High-quality and effective professional development for e-learning must be dynamic. Continually assessing the professional development needs, capabilities, and desires of educators – and recognising that these will change over time – is therefore critical. If an organisation has the appropriate structures to support professional development, uses good practices, and focuses on relevant knowledge and skills, professional development for e-learning will positively affect student achievement.

Designing professional development for educators is similar to the process of designing any course. Rather than starting with content, begin by considering the needs of the learners (in this case the educators) and determine the ‘why’ – the desired outcome of the professional development.

Professional development for e-learning needs to take account of three main elements. You should consider:

1. context (the institutional environment, the systems, and educators’ personal attitudes and beliefs)
2. process (good practices, learning activities)
3. content (the knowledge, skills, and understanding).

1. Context: Why? When? Where?

What does the research say?

Successful development of e-learning capability depends on:

- well-coordinated pedagogical and technical support that is aligned with organisational structures and intentions
- appropriate resources
- good management, leadership, and staff engagement
- organisational knowledge of good practice.

Professional development should be designed for each organisation’s programmes and the specific needs of its educators. Educators are unlikely to prioritise and engage in professional development if they regard e-learning as an unrelated or ‘extra’ activity rather than a core organisational activity.

An organisation must understand good practice if it is to successfully implement e-learning. Lack of knowledge, high workload, and time constraints can be significant barriers and may keep educators from participating in professional development. These constraints may indicate a lack of managerial support. However, if the organisation has clear expectations about the role of e-learning, educators are likely to make informed decisions about engaging in professional development.

Effective e-learning professional development therefore responds to organisational and educator attitudes and beliefs as well as addressing structures and mechanisms.

Most educators, even those who embrace e-learning, only scratch the surface of technology's potential.

What does this mean in practice?

- Plan professional development to align with organisational strategies.
- Communicate organisational strategies to educators so they regard e-learning as a core activity.
- Plan professional development that is personally relevant for educators.
- Acknowledge and design for the changes in time and workload constraints that result from e-learning.
- Use both competency- and capability-based approaches. (Competency-based training concentrates on learning how to use the technical tools; capability-based professional development encourages self-teaching, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation.)
- Limit the number of software applications used for e-learning in the organisation – it is probably best to adopt a multi-functional, single-space learning management system (LMS).

2. Process: How?

What does the research say?

Both formal and informal approaches to professional development are warranted. Educators are concerned about the time it takes to complete formal training; however, they like informal professional development and believe it is effective.

In any organisation, the levels of professional development that educators need are multiple and diverse, as are the factors that influence those levels. Educators' professional development needs, capabilities, and desires also change over time.

Educators have varying levels of competence and confidence with regard to e-learning. Early adopters and late adopters use technology differently. The former prefer to explore and problem solve, whereas late adopters or mainstream users want to be convinced of the benefits of e-learning before they use it.

Any professional development programme that aims to expand the use of e-learning must accommodate this diversity of skills and attitudes. Effective professional development not only affects how educators adopt e-learning; it also establishes and maintains supportive relationships amongst peers, both during and after training.

Educators who undertake professional development online can contextualise the e-learning pedagogies they experience, and better understand their own learners. This form of professional development can be provided by the organisation or accessed from regional, national, or international providers.

Educators who are self-directed and take charge of their own learning are likely to have higher levels of self-efficacy and independence than those who simply acquire competency-based skills. These self-directed learners are likely to use metacognitive approaches such as taking charge of their own learning, using reflective strategies, mentoring, or teaching others.

What does this mean in practice?

- Design professional development programmes that are individualised, relevant, situated, and flexible.
- Design flexible professional development programmes that address both short-term and long-term needs, and that can change over time. (Use just-in-time training as well as long-term programmes that address pedagogical models.)
- Allow educators to undertake activities that convince them of the benefits of e-learning, and to explore and problem solve in a low-risk environment.
- Expose educators to new ideas and examples of good practice.
- Continually expose all educators to applied research that demonstrates successful, pedagogically sound technologies.
- Encourage educators to work with peers, in small groups, and in small learning communities.
- Offer professional development online so educators can experience being e-learners.
- Use different professional development approaches in different situations and contexts, depending on factors such as motivation, incentives, educator values, and the type of support needed at the time.
- Use central, or multidisciplinary, teams to provide appropriate and timely training and knowledge.
- Encourage educators to use metacognitive processes that examine the pedagogical and technical aspects of e-learning and how to foster active learning on line.
- After training, provide ongoing pedagogical and technical support.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for peer and organisational support. Build communities of practice.
- Provide incentives for educators who plan and implement e-learning.

3. Content: What?

What does the research say?

E-learning not only requires that educators learn how to use new technologies; it also requires a shift in how they facilitate the process of learning. They need to learn how to incorporate learner involvement activities into their design, and this change process takes time. Educators who change their mode of teaching from classroom to blended or fully online learning need sound reasons for making that change, and they need to clearly understand their new roles.

Staff development for flexible delivery

As a medium-sized organisation, Bay of Plenty Polytechnic has to plan its provision of services and support in learning technologies carefully to get the best return from its investment.

The development of e-learning is one such area that has attracted investment. Providing adequate training and support for teaching staff who want to use technology in their teaching has been a challenge.

Bay of Plenty Polytechnic's first commitment to e-learning was small. In 2002 a tutor was given 1 day a week to provide support for e-learning developments. In 2005 a consulting team worked with staff on a vision for flexible learning that would increase choices for students. They planned to do this by developing infrastructure and support for staff who use new teaching media.

The new Pikiarero Teaching and Learning Development Centre is responsible for staff development, e-learning support, and the LMS. But the Centre's growing success has created more challenges, many of which arise from the increased expectations of staff and students. One solution to these increased expectations has been to call on tutors who already use e-learning to share their experiences with those who are new to teaching in the sector. These tutors, who have developed teaching resources, explored technologies, and changed their teaching practices for their own courses, are now encouraged to support their colleagues.

The first tier of the Centre's approach to professional development is to provide just-in-time, one-to-one advice for tutors preparing e-learning material for the LMS.

In the second tier, the Centre runs a recurring cycle of workshops on the LMS and its application to teaching and learning. These workshops bring tutors together to reflect on how they will use e-learning, as well as how to use the LMS.

In the third tier, the Centre staff work with programme teams to plan and develop blended learning packages.

In the fourth tier, tutors enrol in online courses run by other organisations: any tutor planning to include online discussion in their course must complete an online facilitation course. This kind of collaborative educational delivery with other institutes of technology and polytechnics has enabled staff to share good practice between the organisations, and has the added benefit of stimulating links in subject areas.

For further details about this case study, go to <http://akoaooteaeroa.ac.nz/takingthelead>

Currently, formal e-learning professional development tends to focus on how to use the tools. Many educators see the need for professional development that includes good teaching and learning practice as well as how to apply technology in their discipline. Professional development programmes should therefore purposefully include the subject of effective pedagogies in online contexts.

What does this mean in practice?

- Focus on e-learning pedagogy in professional development programmes.
- Use professional development to explore the relationships between pedagogical approaches and the technologies they can use to achieve them.
- Demonstrate how to support and motivate learners in online environments.
- Demonstrate how to search for, store, and display digital materials; and how to evaluate e-learning tools.
- Design programmes that show educators how to personalise their instruction and incorporate activities into their instruction.
- Encourage competent educators to share their knowledge and demonstrate good practice to their peers.
- Provide a range of professional development opportunities that address the needs of educators who are beginning to use e-learning and those with more experience.

This bulletin is based on the following research reports:

Clayton, J., & Elliott, R. (2007). *E-learning activities in Aotearoa/New Zealand industry training organisations*.

Hegarty, B., & Penman, M. (2005). *Approaches and implications of e-learning adoption in relation to academic staff efficacy and working practice*. Final report.

Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics of New Zealand. (nd). *Critical success factors for effective use of e-learning with Māori learners*.

Koloto, A., Kaotanga, A., & Tatila, L. (2006). *Critical success factors for effective use of e-learning by Pacific learners*.

Mitchell, D., Clayton, J., Gower, B., Barr, H., & Bright, S. (2005). *E-learning in New Zealand institutes of technology/polytechnics*. Final report.

Mansvelt, J., Shephard, K., Stein, S., et al. (nd). *Professional development for e-learning: A framework for the New Zealand tertiary education sector*.

The following websites have resources for professional development in e-learning.

LDnet is New Zealand's support network for learning designers:
<http://ako.aotearoa.ac.nz/communities/ldnet>

Nga Kiwai Kete is a set of resources and tools to support blended online and face-to-face approaches to e-learning professional development. It has a particular focus on supporting organisations with significant proportions of Māori and Pacific learners.
<http://www.nkk.org.nz/home.php>

Emat also focuses on the professional development needs of educators working with Pacific learners.
<http://elearning.itpnz.ac.nz/emat/index.html>

Toi Whakaoranga is a course for educators working with Māori learners. It includes a facilitators' guide.
http://elearning.itpnz.ac.nz/ToiWhakaoranga/course_resources.htm

This is one of a series of e-learning knowledge resources developed by the Ministry of Education.