AccessACE Research Framework

The fabric of adult learning in Adult Community Education (ACE) is rich and strong. It is made up of many threads. One of these is the role of Information Communications Technology (ICT) as part of a blended teaching and learning repertoire, often known as 'blended learning'. It is the aim of the AccessACE project, with its focus on models of 'blended learning', to identify those particular factors:

1. that increase participation by learners in ACE education and training

2. that make their participation meaningful and significant.

Research Project Perspectives

As part of the initial research phase of this project, the Project Working Group named the ten threads in the next column as key to successful organisational planning and development. Each strand displays a spectrum of possibilities relating to an ACE organisation's educational scope and vision. Each spectrum is not intended to be a value judgment – with 'desirable' at one end and 'undesirable' at the other – but rather a way of capturing the diversity of factors that make up the culture of ACE organisations.

As well, these perspectives can be seen as a planning guide. By providing a tool for mapping an organisation's readiness for 'blended learning', they enable organisations to plot where they are currently situated. This snapshot of the organisation today then becomes a handy reference point for planning for tomorrow. In other words, by locating themselves on each spectrum, ACE organisations can answer, in their own settings, the first of the two key project questions.
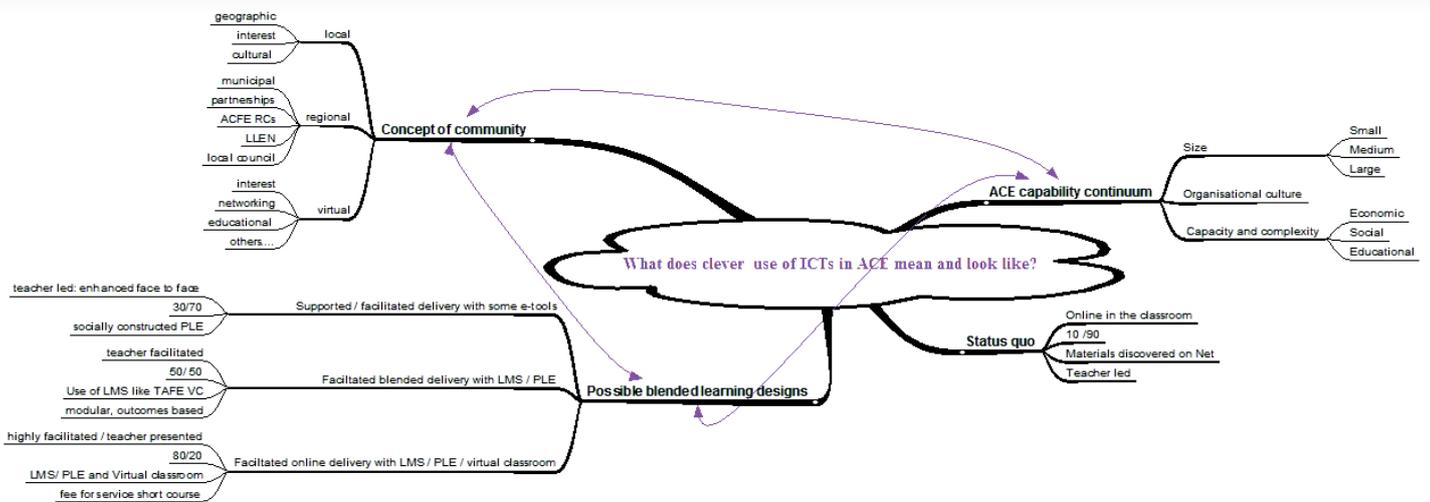
What DOES a clever use of ICT in ACE mean and look like?
This first question is about 'where we are now'.

Learner groups		
Dependent		Independent
One off course		Pathways
Community search		
Local	Regional	Global/Virtual
Community readiness		
Low interest		High interest
Teacher capacity/readiness		
Fearful/Resistant		Passionate/Adventurous
Novices		Confident/Capable
Organisational capacity/commitment/readiness		
Small		Large
Isolated individuals		COM Support
Educational content		
Learner generated		Pre-packaged
Curriculum		
Non-accredited		Accredited
Programs/Courses		
Face to face		Online
Relatively fixed		Constantly changing
Technology		
Low tech		High tech
Your competition		
Don't know		Organisational plans in place

The second key question for this action research project is: **What COULD a clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?** This is a question about the future, about what is educationally possible and desirable. Both parts of the two questions are important. What does it mean? In other words, what are our understandings of the notion, 'a clever use of ICT in ACE'? And what does it look like? In other words, what are our practices?

Understandings and practices, as illustrated in the threads above, are both important. The next page will consider the question of future possibilities for both understandings and practices.

State Government **Victoria**

Concept map

geographic
interest
cultural — local

municipal
partnerships
ACFE RCs
LLEN
local council — regional → Concept of community

interest
networking
educational
others... — virtual

What does clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?

Size — Small / Medium / Large
Organisational culture — ACE capability continuum
Capacity and complexity — Economic / Social / Educational

teacher led: enhanced face to face
30/70
socially constructed PLE — Supported / facilitated delivery with some e-tools

teacher facilitated
50/50
Use of LMS like TAFE VC
modular, outcomes based — Faciltated blended delivery with LMS / PLE

highly facilitated / teacher presented
80/20
LMS/ PLE and Virtual classroom
fee for service short course — Faciltated online delivery with LMS / PLE / virtual classroom

Possible blended learning designs

Status quo — Online in the classroom / 10 /90 / Materials discovered on Net / Teacher led

A clever use of ICT in ACE?

Before talking about 'blended learning options', that is, 'a clever use of ICT in ACE', it is necessary to consider the influences that shape, whether consciously or unconsciously, the educational choices an organisation makes. Research shows that two significant factors, if not the two most significant factors, that determine the educational choices that ACE organisations make are:

1. our 'concept of community' and

2. our 'capability as an organisation'.

The relationship between these factors is illustrated in the concept map above.

'Community' means different things to different people. Communities can be geographical, (based on place) and/or cultural (based on values and identity), can be based on common interests and/or can be united by a common cause. People can be physically present or connected virtually. Communities can be ad-hoc and short-term or enduring and long-term.

They are united, and hence comm/unity, by something they share in common – a locality, a partnership, a network. Some of these interpretations are grouped around the 'concept of community' in the diagram above – each ACE organisation could add more.

'Capability' refers not only to technical capacity and size but to organisational culture and complexity as well. Technical capacity covers matters such as computer hardware and software, bandwidth, server space, ICT staff and maintenance. Organisational culture embraces aspects such as leadership, committee of management commitment, teacher and learner readiness, a critical mass ready for change, policies, responsive pedagogies, depth and breadth of educational content and processes, resourcing and professional development.

It is only when these two – 'concept of community' and 'ACE capability' – have been evaluated that 'a clever use of ICT in ACE' can be considered. This is what the AccessACE project will do as it explores, supports and documents at least three ICT-enabled blended learning design models. As a result, ACE organisations will have access to different ways of developing the capacity to provide a greater variety of programs to individuals and small groups in a supportive and versatile learner-centred manner.

As depicted in the concept map above, the range of 'blended learning designs' will combine different combinations of support and facilitation, online and offline, as well as different degrees and types of online and offline activity. The outcome will be a broader range of rich and rewarding adult learning opportunities, both for adult learners today and adult learners tomorrow.

Delia Bradshaw

How can I find out more?

If you would like more information, please contact Josie Rose at the SMR ACFE regional office on 03 9786 9466 or email josie.rose@dvc.vic.gov.au