

Help is at hand for teachers struggling with technology

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Innovative software to help teachers stay at the forefront of the digital revolution in education has been developed by researchers funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

The [Learning Designer](#) is an interactive program for [teachers](#) that will help them to design and develop lessons plan using digital technologies. "It is vital that the teaching community stay at the forefront of teaching and learning through the use of technology - often referred to as technology enhanced learning (TEL)" says Professor Diana Laurillard, the lead researcher at the Institute of Education.

Despite teachers playing a key role in the introduction and use of TEL in education, until now there has been no large scale development of software to assist teachers in the critical task of lesson design. The innovative nature of TEL presents a new kind of design challenge for teachers used to course and lesson planning for a conventional environment.

"Teachers need support in working out how to introduce technology gradually within resource constraints, how to best use existing materials and how to take full advantage of technology for the benefit of their learners," says Professor Laurillard. "The Learning Designer supports them in all these tasks. It offers teachers an array of ideas and advice, from educational concepts relevant to their chosen activity, to alternative designs relevant to the teaching and learning of that activity" she

continues.

The Learning Designer supports the teaching community by enabling teachers to work together on how to plan and design their teaching resources. It shows how the technologies that are changing the way students learn through collaboration can also support teachers' learning in new ways.

"Computer-supported collaborative learning has long been established as an important form of TEL for students," says Professor Laurillard. "We believe it is equally applicable to teachers' professional development."

Once a teacher has planned a lesson or a module, the software will analyse how the student's time is spent on different types of learning and how much teacher-time it will require. It also allows the teacher to export his or her design to share with colleagues.

Professor Laurillard points out that one of the particular gains of using TEL is that it allows the learning experience to be tailored to individual students. It also makes it possible to save significant teacher preparation time since TEL resources are reusable.

"The programme has been developed in the spirit of reflective and collaborative design," says Professor Laurillard. "Evaluation with teachers and lecturers has now shown that it is not only meeting their requirements, but also helping them develop new ways of thinking about how they design teaching and learning."

The Learning Designer has been built to sustain collaboration and to develop a wider teacher design community. Furthermore, it could be an important research tool to investigate teachers' approaches to innovation in both conventional and technology-based learning environment.

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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