

Developing Tools to Assist Academics in Incorporating Technology into Teaching - Is it Worth it?

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Abstract

The vision of the Faculty of Arts Multimedia Centre at UWA is to create a situation where teaching staff use technology as a regular part of their teaching programs. When the Multimedia Centre was established at the end of 1995, familiarity with educational technology was not high in the Faculty. Rather than focus on one or two high-fliers, we wanted to involve a larger number of staff, across a variety of disciplines.

We decided to begin by creating an authoring application – StoryTime - and teach it to small groups of staff, giving them the skills to develop their own teaching resources. The project became affectionately known as the ‘StoryTime Project’. The primary focus of this project was a team approach with the technical staff working in a close partnership with the teaching staff.

StoryTime is a Macintosh application which allows novice computer users to combine text, images of various formats, and QuickTime media in many ways. Material produced using StoryTime can be used in a Macintosh lab, or converted to web format and served over the Internet. The conversion to web format utilises HTML and JavaScript technologies.

In 1998, the StoryTime Project evolved, and became encompassed by a larger project – which was the development of an on-line learning environment – ‘The Forum Project’. This project was fuelled by the need to service the operations of the recently opened UWA Albany Centre.

Students enrolled in courses using The Forum are able to access course material, participate in an on-line bulletin board, evaluate web resources in an on-line discussion, listen to streamed lecture recordings while viewing associated material and access multimedia modules developed in StoryTime.

The components developed for The Forum each require a different level of involvement and commitment from the teaching staff. The involvement ranges from a ‘black box’ model for the streamed lecture recordings, where teaching staff drop their audio-taped lecture recording to the Multimedia Centre and then students access the streamed lecture within a few hours, to the resource intensive preparation of multimedia modules using web creation tools.

A few years into the project, it seems an appropriate time to ask the question – what has worked and what hasn’t?

The paper will highlight the experiences and issues associated with this project. In particular: people involved, technology utilised, material produced, problems incurred, and future plans. There will also be particular focus on a comparison of the ‘black box’ approach, compared to the team approach.