

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.

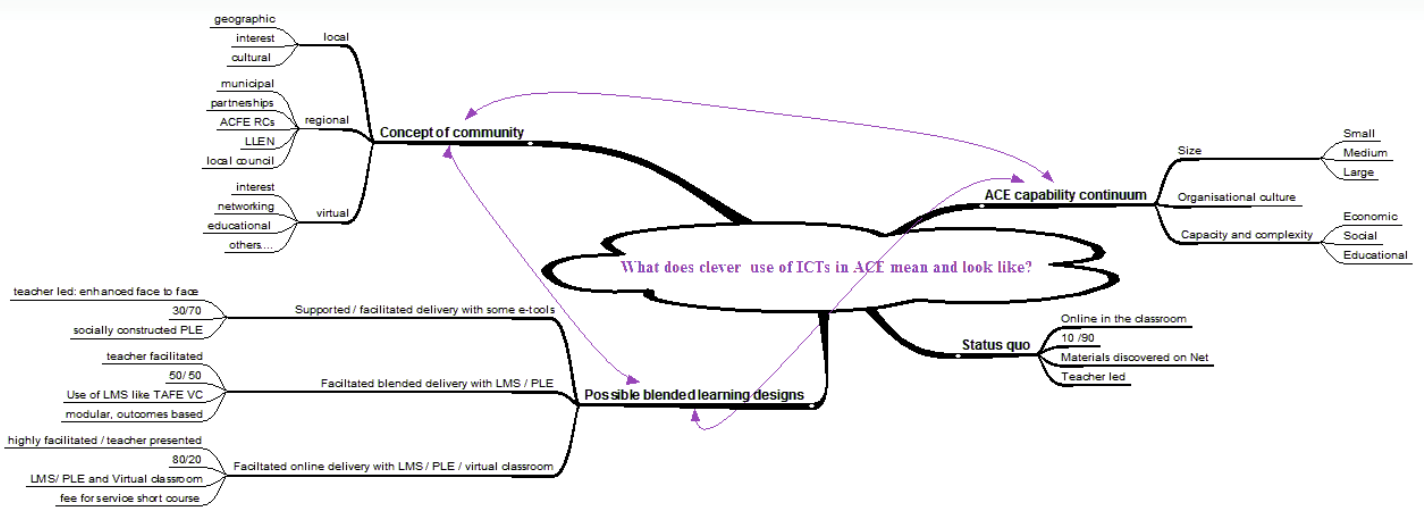
What DOES a clever use of ICT in ACE mean and look like?

This first question is about 'where we are now'.

Learner groups	
Dependent	Independent
One off course	Pathways
Community reach	
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.



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.

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How can I find out more?

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