

# POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES FOR ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING IN ARTS EDUCATION; IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING A TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

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## Abstract

During the Covid-19 Emergency Remote Teaching everybody was forced to teach online, even in courses, like the arts (visual arts, theatre, music, dance) that were not traditionally taught online. The implications of these experiences relate to opportunities for online learning to widen access at universities to quality arts education courses and thus contribute to digital transformation in Higher Educational Institutions. This article focuses on a European-funded project titled “Critical ARts Education for Sustainable Societies” (CARE/SS) that aims to capitalise on the opportunities noted during the Covid-19 pandemic for online teaching-learning for training pre-service and in-service teachers. It discusses challenges and opportunities for experiential, collaborative and active learning in the arts and identifies the characteristics of a successful online or blended framework for arts education courses, as discussed by the partners of the CARE/SS project.

Keywords: Online learning, blended learning, arts education, teachers, preservice teachers.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The sudden disruption of regular classes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to Emergency Remote Teaching in Higher Education brought into focus the challenges and the opportunities to offer high-quality educational experiences (e.g., [1]). The pandemic experience facilitated the imagination of new possibilities to develop meaningful experiences for learners, even in the arts that are traditionally considered too experimental and hands-on to be offered online. Arts subjects are considered the most important ones in difficult times for empowering children to overcome emotionally difficult situations, build children’s resilience, enhance understanding of others, and encourage engagement and participation, leading to the development of sustainable societies [2]. Therefore, there is a need for digital transformation in Higher Education Institutions in the arts courses that are addressed to in-service and pre-service educators through digital modes of learning, and the integration of various new and emergent technologies.

This article is grounded on the work conducted within a European-funded project titled “Critical ARts Education for Sustainable Societies” (CARE/SS) (For more information about the project, please visit the website: <https://www.frederick.ac.cy/en/critical-arts-education-for-sustainable-societies>). The project is situated within the growing demands of supporting the development of key competencies in arts education to ensure quality teaching and open access to quality arts education training through online and blended courses. It aims to offer useful guidance into how education systems across Europe can improve to provide educators and young Europeans with the skills required for our future societies to coexist in peace and respect. The article focuses on the first work package of CARE/SS, and specifically on the main outcome of the whole package, which is the proposition of a pedagogical framework for learning-teaching in a blended or fully online environment specifically for arts education. The second work package aims to use the proposed framework to develop or adjust existing courses for training pre-service or in-service primary school teachers in the context of their undergraduate or postgraduate studies or as a continuous professional development opportunity. During the third work package, the courses/training (developed based on the proposed framework) will be implemented, and thus the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed pedagogical framework will be examined.

To conclude, the current article aims to propose a transformative pedagogical framework for online and blended learning for arts education and contemporary developments in the arts that are characterized by the experiential/ practical component of these fields and the creative production of messages that are socially negotiated and culturally formed.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

In this section, the process (methodology) for reaching to the proposed framework is presented. This process was based on reflective practice in teaching. Reflective practice and inquiry are considered essential activities for teacher educators to improve their own practice and also to contribute to the collective knowledge about teaching [3].

### **2.1 Stage 1: State of the art**

This stage included a literature review of 60 important reports, articles and books on the topic of online and blended learning in Higher Education Institutions. An overview of the most well-known models in blended and distance/online learning was conducted. The following blended and distance/online learning modes were thoroughly examined in an attempt to develop the grounds of a transformative pedagogical framework for distance/online and blended learning in arts education. The examination of the models guided the discussion in regard to the suitability of the model to be employed for Arts Education. It is important to clarify that there are no models developed for specific disciplines, thus there are no models specifically for Arts Education. The following models were selected based on their uses, applications and success in various disciplines:

- The Five stage Model of e-learning ([4], [5], [6]),
- The Community of Inquiry Model (coi), ([7], [8], [9], [10]),
- The SAMR Model ([11],
- The Moule Model – The e-learning ladder [12],
- The Conversational Framework Model ([13], [14]).

### **2.2 Stage 2: Academics' voice**

At this stage, the partners of the CARE/SS consortium interviewed 25 academics within their institutions about the challenges and opportunities of blended and online learning in their arts education disciplines (visual arts, music, theatre, and dance). Their views, perceptions and experiences are presented in a forthcoming article, led by the coordinator of the project.

### **2.3 Stage 3: Proposition**

Stage 3 included the proposition by the coordinator of the project, to adjust an existing pedagogical framework to fit the specificities of arts education. The proposition was based on the outcomes of both stages 1 and 2, but it also resulted after a discussion with all the partners that took place in stage 4. Thus, stage 3 overran stage 4 in terms of time span.

### **2.4 Stage 4. Train-the-trainers**

The coordinator of the project organized a train-the-trainers activity to make sure that all partners would become familiar with the framework and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to employ it for developing targeted-localized teacher courses/ training. At the beginning of the train-the-trainers activity, the partners were presented with two proposals: two existing pedagogical frameworks, the Community of Inquiry Model [7] and the Conversational Framework Model [14]. Through discussion and exchange of ideas, the consortium commonly reached the decision on which of the two was going to be “adopted” for the CARE/SS project. Some modifications were also proposed.

### 3 RESULTS

In this section, we present the framework that was agreed on. The proposed framework is based on Laurillard's Conversational Framework [14] and proposes modifications to address the needs of the Arts Education fields (visual arts education, theatre education, and music education). The framework was selected for various reasons. Firstly, it is considered student-oriented since it has been developed to guide and explore the best way to support the learners' needs and learning, and it gives great emphasis on providing students' feedback and reflection. Additionally, it provides the grounds to develop a learning environment that encourages student participation and engagement that leads to student-student interaction and students-instructor interaction, taking into consideration technology integration and the absence of constant face-to-face teaching and learning. Moreover, as noted in the literature (stage 1) and the research undertaken in stage 2, key challenges for academics were connected with meaningful ways to interact with arts in an online environment. Interactions did not include only possible iterative opportunities for the learners to interact with the tutor and amongst themselves but also opportunities to interact with the content of the arts disciplines, which should be based on personal experience, embodying and learning by doing.

Arts Education emphasizes hands-on experience and experiential learning. Practice, interaction, engagement and feedback from peers and instructors were considered crucial elements in Arts Education by the partners. Laurillard's Conversational Framework [14] provides the grounds to develop a learning environment that encourages student participation and engagement. Specifically, one of the characteristics of this model is the way teacher-student interact, taking into consideration technology integration and the absence of constant face-to-face teaching and learning. Laurillard made these interactions obvious by categorising them into: narrative, interactive and communicative/interactive.

The model is student-oriented since it has been developed to guide and explore the best way to support the learners' needs. One more crucial element besides interaction and communication in Arts Education is feedback given to students and time for reflection. Laurillard's model provides a means to capture repetitive, communicative, adaptive, thoughtful and goal-oriented actions with feedback necessary to support the entire learning process.

Moreover, the Conversation Framework provides a very well-structured model, with specific steps to be followed when the learning designer tool is used to design the learning environment at the macro level. The step-by-step process given by the Learning Designer Tool supports the development of learning sessions and modules with an orientation to pedagogical strategies (See Figures 1 and 2). The tool guides the instructor in developing its lesson/module/ session. It clearly helps the instructor to differentiate between the six types of learning activities (read/watch/ listen, collaborate, discuss, investigate, practice, produce), putting emphasis on what is important given the peculiarities and characteristics of each discipline.

The proposed framework was discussed, and the partners experimented with the Learning Designer Tool. After various fruitful discussions and insights by all of the partners, numerous adjustments are suggested to take place. Specifically, the partners agreed that they would not use the online designer tool (through the wiki); however, the template will be downloaded in a word processing application (i.e. M.S Word) and be used as an offline template. The decision to use the template offline was based to the fact that various additions and changes were made to address the adjustments suggested by the partners (see below). The partners are aware that since the template will be used offline, the tool of the pie chart that represents the various activities will not be used.

The partners recommended the following additions for the model to be further aligned with the Arts Education field:

In the description section, the instructors are expected to mention the materials and tools to be used. Also, in the same section, it is essential to mention that the planning takes place for a week or a unit. Along the same lines, in each TLA (Teaching and Learning Activities), the instructors are expected to mention the number of students that participate in each activity, how the students will work for the particular activity (i.e. by themselves on a personal level, in small groups, a combination of the two aforementioned) as well as how much time the students will spend if they work on an individual basis and in groups within the same activity.

A detailed set of guidelines was developed in regard to the updated learning designer template to be used by the partners to design the blended learning sessions, along with directions for completion.

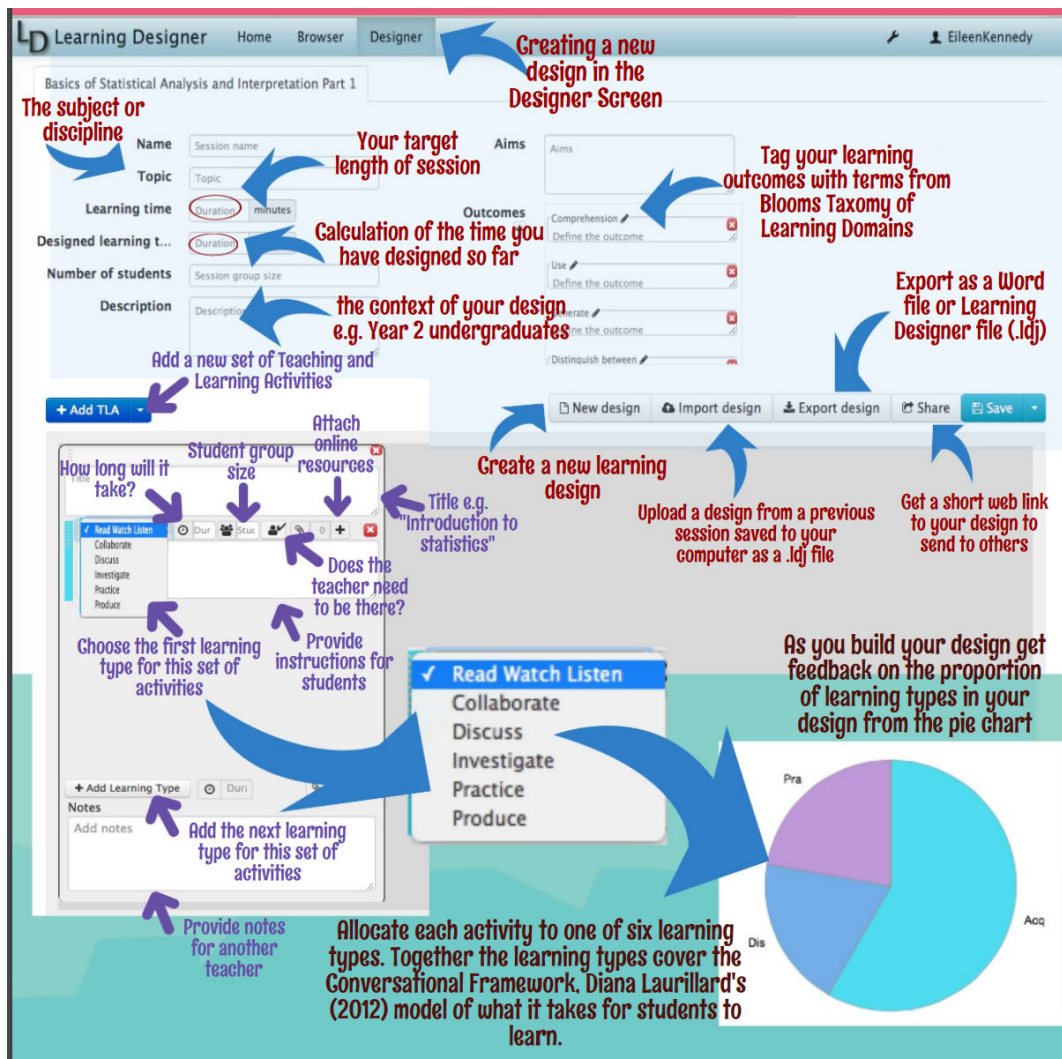


Figure 1: The Learning Designer Tool by Diana Laurillard (Source: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/learning-designer/>)

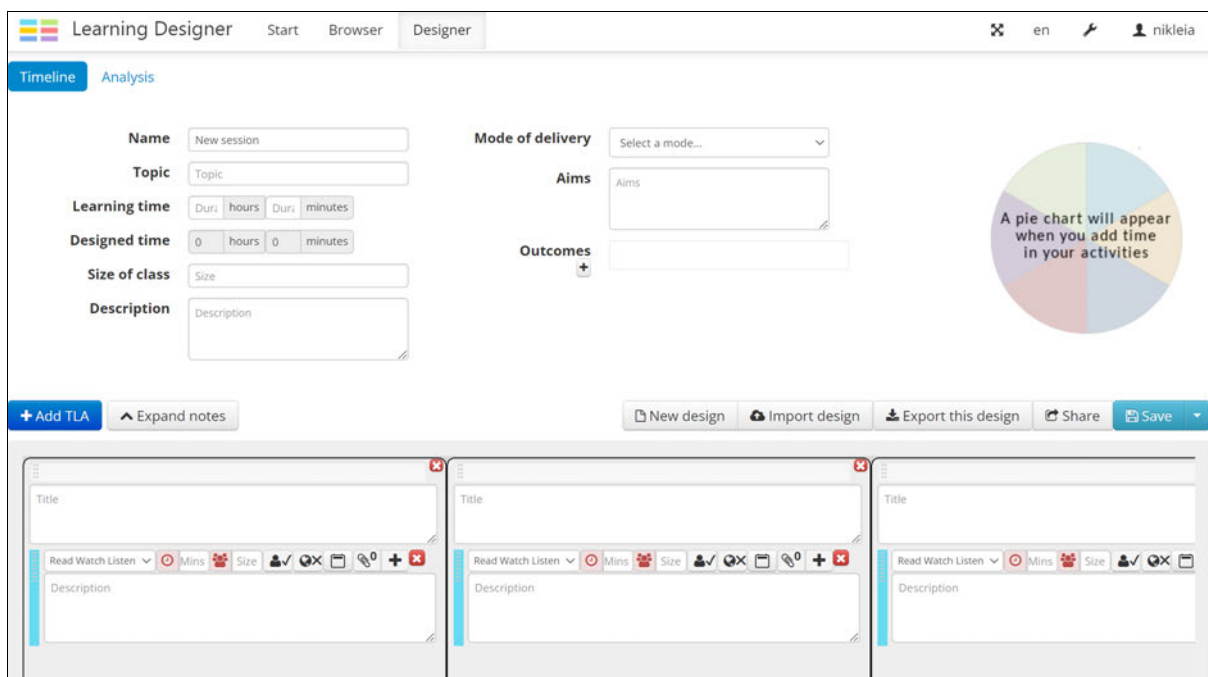


Figure 2: The template of the Learning Designer Tool by Diana Laurillard; screen shot of the online tool.

As mentioned above, the Learning Scenario Model includes six types of TLAs (Teaching and Learning Activities). These are the following: 1) read/watch/ listen, 2) collaborate, 3) discuss, 4) investigate, 5) practice, and 6) produce. The partners suggested that there was a need for three more categories to be added to have an increased alignment with the needs and demands of the Arts Education field. Specifically, the 7<sup>th</sup> Category suggested is Reflection. The partners felt that it was essential for the Arts fields for learners to be able to reflect in an artistic way. The 8<sup>th</sup> Category was named Others and was expected to include various actions necessary for the Arts Education field, such as: performances, field trips, visits (on-site and/or online), guest speakers, and screening. The 9<sup>th</sup> and final TLA added was entitled Evaluation/Assessment.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

There are no models developed for specific disciplines (engineering, education, health, sciences, arts); thus, there are no models focused on Arts Education. The Conversational Framework Model [14] will be employed and tested during the current European-funded project, and it is expected that adjustments and justifications will be recommended to be effectively applied within the Arts Education discipline. Based on the literature in Arts Education (i.e. [15]), the educational material provided to students plays a significant role, i.e. being rich in video and audio demonstrations as well as the type of activities. It seems that the Conversational Framework Model can help the instructors address the issues and concerns raised regarding educational material, social interaction, communication, experiential/practical work, collaboration and feedback.

There has been an extensive literature review regarding blended learning, its practices, design, delivery and implementation. Blended Learning is ambiguously defined in the literature, and there is no unified view ([16], [17]). Recently blended learning was characterized as the future 'major instructional movement' [18] or the 'new normal' [19].

Given the experience gained during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the emergency remote teaching employed, as well as taking into consideration the characteristics of Arts Education, it seems that blended learning reveals to shed light and addresses some of the concerns and challenges faced by arts educators. CARE/SS project will test the application of the Conversational Framework Model in both blended learning and distance learning courses/ training in arts education.

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