

**Perspectives on Learning and Information
in
Flexible Learning Environments**

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Abstract

This study explores the perspectives of teachers and learners in flexible learning environments in relation to information and learning, and the implications of these perspectives for the design of effective library and information services.

It adopted a case study methodology to investigate three flexible learning academic subjects offered at the University of Wollongong in Autumn Semester (March to June) 2000. Using a contextual and document review, teacher and student questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, data were gathered on participant perspectives on the following key areas of research interest: concepts of flexible learning; the flexible learning environment; the role of the teacher; the role of the learner; methods of communication; concepts of information; methods of presenting information; using information resources and services; the role of the librarian; concepts of learning; the learning process; and the relationships between information, learning and knowledge. Interview data were analysed using the constant comparative method to identify conceptual categories and higher-level themes within individual cases as well as collectively across all three cases.

The main conclusions of the study were that: (1) the ways in which information and learning are conceived are central to understanding information use as part of the learning process; (2) there are a number of identifiable processes or phases involved in using information to learn; (3) the integration of information resources and communication mechanisms is a major benefit of the online learning environment; and (4) the design of the flexible learning environment influences student approaches to learning and the use of information and learning resources.

The implications of the study conclusions for library and information services include the need for librarians to develop an understanding of the relationship between information and learning; the need to encourage active engagement

with information, qualitative/deep approaches to learning, and critical and interpretative thinking; the need to integrate library resources, services and communication systems into online learning environments; and the need for librarians to develop their roles as collaborative partners with teachers, as guides and facilitators of student learning, as designers of information environments, and as advocates for the incorporation of information resources and services into flexible learning environments.

Suggestions for further research include ongoing studies on information conceptualisation and use within flexible learning environments, and a larger scale phenomenographic study of conceptions of information.