



# Community Of Integrated Blended Learning In Europe Developing a Community Based Methopedia



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## Enhancing Blended Learning – Developing a Community Based Methopedia

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# Partners



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DE.



# Pitfalls of Blended Learning

Enough to set up technical structures & educate trainers?

Integrated strategies, change and acceptance management!

Institutional Level

Tend to resist changing established patterns (F2F activities)

Instructional Level

comble

Learner Level

End users are not always equipped to handle the technical, pedagogical and organisational challenges!

Educators coming from a traditional teaching background.



# COMBLE: Goals and Products

- Reference model
  - Applied developed
  - Interviewing APs

BL Readiness Check  
Decision Maker Handbook

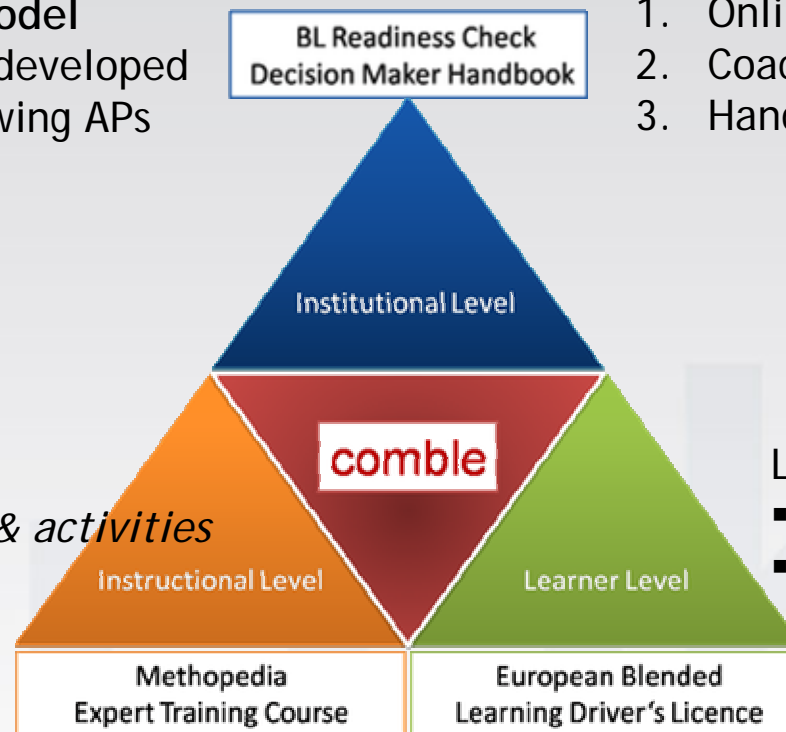
1. Online survey
2. Coaching
3. Handbook for the community

## Methopedia

- Community
- Wiki
- *sharing methodologies & activities*

## Expert Trainers Course

- ICT & PBL learning
- BL Course
- Using 2nd Life
- Masters module



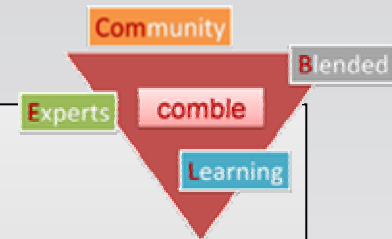
- Learners course
- Online Course
  - Certification

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# Strategy

- Target groups = Learning institutions
  - Further education institutions
  - University institutions
  - Businesses
- Target groups = Application partners
- Theory - and User-driven and applied development
- All products are available as Open Knowledge
- Long term: Business strategy for coaching
  - Methopedia
  - Pedagogical design of BL problem and project based learning environments





# Blended learning

The term blended learning refers to diverse aspects of learning and teaching and there is no exclusive definition or approach related to the term. (Whitelock & Jelfs 2003) opened a special issue of the journal of educational media on blended learning by introducing three definitions of the term:

- the integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches;
- the combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment;
- the combination of a number of pedagogical approaches, irrespective of learning technology use;

For us blended learning is not a learning paradigm or learning theory by itself, but rather a pragmatic term expressing multiple ways of approaching pedagogical design.





## Community-based methopedia

### **Aim**

- Methopedia is envisioned to be a community based wiki-system, combined with social networking features, where trainers and teachers from various sectors (vocational training, enterprises, universities, and public bodies) can consult, discuss, describe and share blended learning methods and activities and best practice.

### **Quality of education through sharing**

- The aim of the COMBLE project and Methopedia is to contribute to leveraging the quality of education and training in Europe by engaging practitioners and researchers in developing, sharing and promoting innovative blended learning concepts and methods.



# Challenges

- To enable practitioners to share methods and learning designs, an important task is to construct a shared, flexible pedagogical model/template for describing these.
  - What do we mean with methods, activities and best practice?
  - How to develop the model? Is it something to be done at the desk top, or in the laboratories – or do we better engage with the practitioners?
  - What are the social and technical drivers to participate in and contribute to Methopedia for managers, instructors and learners



# Methodology

## Literature study

- In the paper we discuss and synthesise existing literature within the area of learning design to identify ways of proceeding with the development of Methopedia and the creation of a flexible framework for sharing learning designs.

## Descriptive model

- On basis of this, we present a broad descriptive model and argue that a more elaborate framework for learning designs/activities needs to be developed through further theoretical and conceptual work

## Participatory design

- but more importantly, and based on existing research of participatory design, we argue that it is necessary that the model is developed through engaging the partner-network of trainers from business and education, and position them as co-creators of models and frameworks.

## Outlining socio-technical requirements and functionalities

- discussing and outlining some of the requirements and functionalities which also relate more broadly to the technical and social aspects of Methopedia.
  - Social drivers for Methopedia
  - Technical requirements, use functionalities, Wiki techniques, aesthetics and user experiences



## Learning design – design considerations for methopedia

- In this section we situate what we mean by ‘methods’ ‘activities’ and sharing of ‘best practices’ within broader theoretical and methodological discussions.
- We locate this discussion within the field of ‘learning design’, which is an area of research that has gained increased attention.
- However, we need to consider, how existing methodologies and standards within Learning Designs fit within the field of blended learning?



## What is Learning Design

- Stated very broadly the area of 'learning design' is concerned with enabling educators to create, design and share pedagogically sound, high-quality 'learning designs' or effective practices. One common notion within this area is the importance of learners' activity or learning activities, as summed up by (Britain 2004):
  - *The first general idea behind learning design is that people learn better when actively involved in doing something (i.e. are engaged in a learning activity).*
  - *The second idea is that learning activities may be sequenced or otherwise structured carefully and deliberately in a learning workflow to promote more effective learning.*
  - *The third idea is that it would be useful to be able to record 'learning designs' for sharing and re-use in the future. (Britain 2004, p. 2)*



## What is Learning Design

- First of all this signals a move away from an exclusive focus on delivering (digital) packaged content to students.
- Within learning design the idea is instead to understand content as part of a flow of learning activities that students engage actively with. Furthermore, that this flow can be represented and shared in various ways – ranging from textual descriptions to being embedded in software systems and packages which can represent and run pre-designed sequences of activities.
  - The ladders are the intentions behind standards and software systems such as LAMS (Learning Activity Management System) and IMS-LD.
- Another point of Learning Designs is to make teachers more reflective about their teaching practice and how to design for effective learning by providing them with ‘frameworks’ for how to create and describe learning designs.
  - The latter in particular by making more explicit the relations between pedagogical approaches and different kinds of learning designs/learning activities.



## Summing up on Learning Designs

### **General understanding of learning design**

- Although, there is no generally agreed upon definition of what constitutes a 'learning design' or a 'learning activity', there seems to be a general understanding that a learning design has a certain learning objective, has a sequential structure or flow, consists of multiple learning activities and that there are a number of resources and/or learning supports related to the design or the activities.

### **Nested hierarchies**

- Thus, the relations between learning designs and learning activities can be thought of as expressible in terms of nested hierarchies, where a learning design consist of several learning activities. Learning activities can also encompass multiple smaller learning activities, which in the IMS-LD specification are referred to as an activity structure.



## Blended Learning & Learning Design

- We do not, however, envision LAMS or IMS-LD to be the main way of sharing and collaborating around learning designs. There are already existing sites where IMS-LD and LAMS designs can be shared, and we find it problematic relying too much on these standards in relation to 'blended learning' designs. Although they, to a certain degree, can be employed and used as a blended resource we do not find it feasible that the 'blended learning designs' have to be encapsulated in or dependent on particular software packages/environments. By this we do not completely dismiss these as something that could be shared in Methopedia, but we do not want Methopedia too tightly coupled with or dependent on these.
- So what to do?
  - We have found inspiration in a model by (Berge 2006), to which we have added alternative descriptions (the grey column).





**Table 1: Model adapted from (Berge 2006)**

<b>Pedagogy, Learning Theory, (learning designs)</b>	Pedagogical Approach			
<b>Course templates, descriptions, sequences of activities, learning designs</b>	Course Design			
<b>Activity structures, activities, mini-activities</b>	Course design components			
<b>Materials and resources</b>	Own Material	External material	Repurposed external material	Reification of practice



## Levels in LD

- Berges model serves as a tool to map and “order” the different approaches and activities within learning design and activities relevant for Methopedia to include, but it also leads to questions of the relations between the different levels.
- By this we mean relations between a particular ‘learning activity’ and a particular approach, for as we have already mentioned there seem to be some differences in how an activity is understood (or that they can be understood at many different levels simultaneously).
- Some learning activities seem to be thought of as course design components, which are not necessarily connected to a certain course design or pedagogical approach, but can be implemented and utilised in a number of different ‘learning designs’.
  - A ‘web hunt’ or a ‘brain storming’ activity might be used both within a communication and science course to fulfil different needs: “define a term” or “serve as a background to identify a problem to work with in more depth” (such ‘generic’ activities are what (Conole et al. 2004) refer to as mini-learning activities).
- This raises questions of how to describe and categorise the individual levels, but also how to describe or implement possible relations between the levels. Because can we talk about generic mini-learning activities if one wants to create and share ‘learning designs’ as flows inspired by a particular pedagogical approach; or as blends between different approaches, as suggested in the definition of blended learning, can we then talk about ‘generic’ activities?



## Viable ways of proceeding with Methopedia

- One way would be to delve into more theoretical and conceptual work to discuss, synthesise and propose a conceptual derivative or 'pick and mix' between all the different Learning Design 'solutions'.
- However, an equally important outcome of the work within the field of learning design, suggests that it is essential to actively engage the practitioners one is trying to address with the 'solution' (Knight & Roberts 2007).
  - A study by (de Freitas et al. 2008) concludes that it can be very problematic to develop an overarching, elaborate framework or model and then expect it to be something that practitioners will immediately recognise the value of and subsequently start to use; rather it is important to realise the practitioners' needs to reinterpret and adapt such models, thus becoming co-producers of the models.
  - This may in turn lead to non-standardised models or models which are not universal, but meaningful to different communities. They further analyse how various types of educational practitioners interpreted and adapted the presented framework differently and in accordance with their particular perspectives and needs. (see also many studies within the so-called Scandinavian Approach to system design)
- These insights suggest that the design of Methopedia and the development of a pedagogical and theoretical framework for sharing methods i.e. learning designs, activities and best practices need to be rooted in empirical work and engagement with practitioners.



## Dialogue-design

- In the COMBLE- project, we will we employ a dialogue design-approach (Nielsen, Dirckinck-Holmfeld & Danielsen 2003), which means involving the application partners from industry and education in order to:
  - Refine, negotiate and co-develop existing frameworks and approaches in collaboration with the partners/practitioners in accordance with their needs and inputs
  - Identify the learning activities and resources, which are already in-use and co-developing ways of describing these.
  - The process will be realised through design-workshops, but also by using Methopedia itself as an active, partly self-organising social community/network to continuously involve and collaborate with the partners and other practitioners.



## Technical aspects of the Methopedia

- To develop the Methopedia community for blended learning discussions and to share knowledge, methods and designs we wish to provide:

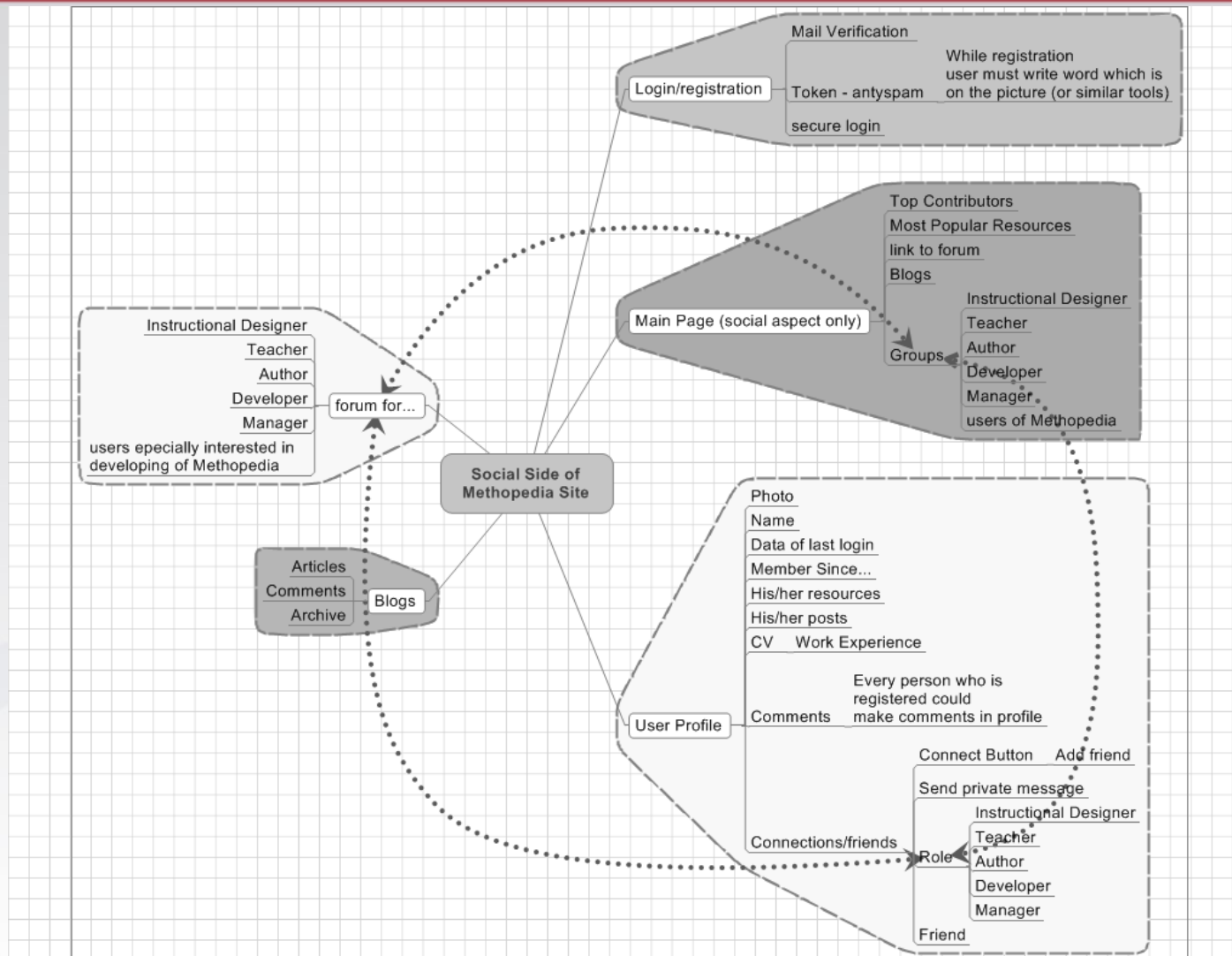
- a wiki, and
- a connected social network

Based on already existing technological standards and tools



## Requirement profile and suitable technology

- To choose a suitable technology, we created a requirement profile by searching for similar projects and also by evaluating different wiki engines.
  - There are already many resources about e-learning and blended learning on the Internet and we have already mentioned some of the interesting collections of activities (e.g. <http://www.learn-line.nrw.de/angebote/methodensammlung/liste.php>).
  - In order to gain an overview of some of the existing solutions, find inspiration and elicit some preliminary requirement we have also viewed and evaluated a number of other sites e.g.:
  - <http://www.uni-duesseldorf.de/ttt/?id=91&kat=b15>
  - [http://lehrerfortbildung-bw.de/kompetenzen/projektkompetenz/methoden\\_a\\_z/](http://lehrerfortbildung-bw.de/kompetenzen/projektkompetenz/methoden_a_z/))





## Social aspects of a Methopedia

- Apart from the technical requirements there are a number of social requirements or drivers that need to be addressed in order to create, sustain and nurture a living community.
- These might be different depending on the shape of the community, but also dependent on the maturity and aim. To expand a bit on this we draw on (Dron & Anderson 2007) who outline three different levels of social aggregations which are useful heuristics for thinking about differently scaled social constellations. The authors differ between:
  - a group,
  - a network and
  - a collective.





## Social constellations

- **The group** is a social constellation with conscious membership-structures and awareness of other members; often they are formed around a particular task and will last only for a certain period of time, such as a project group, team or the like.
- **Networks**, in contrast, are formed around more vaguely defined overlapping interest e.g. people having an interest in a particular game, hobby, sport etc. Such online networks are well known from e.g. usenet or other site-based interest groups (Baym 2007) where membership is more fleeting and the degree or intensity of participation from individual members may vary much. As (Baym 2007) describes these kind of interest-networks are taking new shapes and distribute their participation across many different sites (blog-rings, social networking sites and so on).
  - **Communities of practice** (Wenger, 1998) is a kind of networks building on strong ties, mutual engagement and a shared enterprise
- The final level of social aggregation is the **collective** which is actually an outcome of the combined actions of distributed individuals being largely unaware of each other. The authors mention recommendation-systems, social news filtering (e.g. digg.com) and tag-clouds as the outcome of collectives. The collective then, is not a social constellation with a sense of membership, but rather a 'wisdom of the crowd' phenomenon. Whereas groups are often structured and designed the latter two social constellations are more emergent phenomena. This is important in relation to the 'social drivers' for participation.



## Concluding remarks

### **Heuristic tool, and continued conceptual and theoretical work**

- Based on a review and synthesis of some of the existing literature within the field of 'learning design' we have presented a very general and broad model (Table 1); and we have suggested that this can serve as a heuristic tool for the project's continued work on discussing and mapping other approaches and frameworks within the research field of learning design, and for continued methodological, conceptual and theoretical work on creating an overarching, general descriptive model for sharing learning designs.

### **Participatory design and partnerships**

- However, based on existing research, we have equally argued that it is necessary that such models are developed through engaging the partner-network of trainers from business and education, and to position them as co-creators of models and frameworks. Therefore, Methopedia should be designed as a social space for such a development through facilitating and nurturing a lively community.

### **Communities take different shapes – have different social drivers**

- In relation to this, we have argued that 'communities' can take different shapes and form around varying motives; furthermore, that these different constellations have different 'social drivers' for participation, which might change over time as the composition and scale of the community changes.
  - Groups, Communities of Practice, Networks and Collectives



## Middle-sized community?

- One general concern in relation to Methopedia is the size or kind of social constellation. The dream is always to create something big and connect as many as possible – the idea of the collective
- However, in order to integrate the users as producers of Methopedia and adapt across business, education and academia, we will initiate the development with our application partners.
  - The idea of starting in smaller groups is supported by a study of William Erbe, as discussed by (Cavanagh 2007), who found that the key factor affecting information diffusion was the level of intimacy within a group. According to Erbe's study (Erbe 1962) information diffusion occurs better in environments where there are a large number of medium-sized groups who meet regularly over a sustained period, as it is in such environments that members may allow new information to be obtained (Cavanagh 2007 p, 112).

Erbe's study supports the idea of initially creating a middle-sized community around Methopedia as a starting point. By keeping it small we can maintain the level of intimacy between the participants and make Methopedia useful to the core participants. Methopedia can then subsequently become a node in a larger network or learning design community.

- However, is the philosophy of Erbe still valid in the 21st millenium, where *networks* and the *collectives* are the emergent social constellations?



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### Latest activity



Blog: Methopedia - next steps  
Christian Niemczik just now



Comble presentation  
Christian Niemczik 6 minutes ago

### Welcome



### Links

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- ◆ [Insights-Group.de](#)
- ◆ [Insights@XING](mailto:Insights@XING)

Links:

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[www.methopedia.eu](http://www.methopedia.eu)  
*or use the contact form:*  
[@ comble-project.eu](mailto:@comble-project.eu)

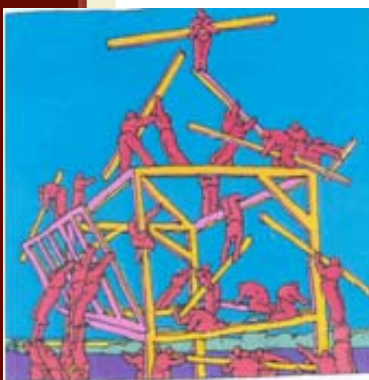


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