

Tameside College: embedding e-learning pedagogy in initial teacher training

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1. The organisation

Tameside College delivers a number of different initial teacher training (ITT) programmes, including the University of Huddersfield PG/CE, the University of Sunderland PG/CE and Stages 1 and 2 of the City and Guilds 7407. The project focuses on in-service trainees. On average, there are approximately 120 trainee teachers on these programmes, over half of whom are employed by the college on either a full or a part-time basis.

The role of ITT in supporting teaching and learning within the college is reflected in the position of ITT within the organisational structure. ITT is managed by the Teaching and Learning Manager, who reports to the Director of Workforce Development, and is responsible for organising support for teaching staff, including the development of skills related to use of e-learning methods. The key role of ITT in promoting the use of ILT and facilitating the development of related skills has been recognised for some time with a specialist IT tutor joined the ITT team in September 2003. The team recognises the benefits of using ILT in ITT both in terms of the benefits to learners and in terms of spreading good practice which will then be transferred to all curriculum areas.

2. Overview

The achievements obtained, some of which have been unexpected, come through participation in an LSDA-funded transformation project, run between January and July 2005, to embed e-learning within initial teacher training programmes. The project has shown how a coaching approach to continual professional development has assisted in developing staff skills more widely and helped to embed the use of ILT within curriculum areas. Case studies were used to identify the distance travelled by both staff and students in the use of ILT within the curriculum; even where the distance travelled was limited it was certainly evident that it was causing participants to reflect on how in the future they could use ILT within their own curriculum areas and thus enabled them to set targets for future development.

One initial objective was to create a resource that catalogued e-learning materials used within the college. This has grown into an interactive resource of evaluated materials and a repository of current use and practice of e-learning within curriculum areas.

3. Details

Approach

The overall approach was to keep-it-simple and build on the skills that ITT staff and students already had, primarily a familiarity with the use of word processing, presentation packages, e-mail and searching the Internet. An initial audit of ILT skills was undertaken to identify the base for the start of the project. This showed a diverse range of skills ranging from novice to expert. It was originally envisaged that support for the ITT team would be provided by means of a structured training programme, based on results of a skills audit. However, as individual needs differed considerably, a coaching approach was adopted, whereby the ICT specialist worked with colleagues individually, team teaching on occasion, to assist with skills development and resource preparation creating interactive materials extending the use of applications already known. A similar approach was used with students with the added support of peer coaching.

The IT specialist introduced both staff and students to new software through the use of exemplar material in their own teaching and encouraging discussion on how they themselves could use and adapt the material.

Scale

The project involved some 50 plus ITT students and 3 ITT staff during the six months of the project. Two cross-college staff development days have been held, one a showcase of how some staff are using ILT in their teaching and one in September, where all academic staff were asked to contribute and evaluate an e-learning tool they had used for the resource catalogue. This resulted in over 200 web-sites, CD-ROMs, and NLN materials being evaluated in terms of where they could be found, ease of use, how they had been used, costs and the relevant curriculum areas, being added to the resource catalogue.

Impact

The project has raised awareness by both teachers and trainees of the potential of e-learning. They have been motivated to participate in training events and work with our specialist to raise skill levels. We will run dissemination events to share what we have learned with our HE partners and other FE partner colleges. Learners have benefited from their teachers' (ITT trainees) more confident use of e-learning.

All teachers participated in a college-wide staff development day in which trainee teachers demonstrated good practice in e-learning. A second internal training day involved large numbers of teachers using the resource evaluation tool, investigating and evaluating an e-learning resource. Records of internal lesson observations held after these staff development days indicate an increase in the use of e-learning on the part of college staff.

Costs and benefits

Funding was provided by the LSDA, but the project undoubtedly required a substantial extra effort on the part of all staff involved. A significant benefit is that all staff delivering ITT now use e-learning methods and emphasise the benefits to trainee teachers. Trainees understand that they are expected to use ILT regularly with their own learners.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

A significant deterrent to the use of ILT is lack of awareness of its potential. Staff training should focus not only on skills development but also on awareness raising and discussion of the pedagogical reasons for using ILT. Peer observations and team teaching should be used to share best practice and raise the profile of e-learning and promote discussion regarding appropriate applications. This applies to all areas of the curriculum, including ITT. The review of schemes of work was in itself very effective staff development for the ITT team, detailed, extensive discussions and review of methods resulted in needs identification and training requests from all team members.

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