8. Symposium: Perspectives on Institutional Implementation of e Learning: Stories and Ideas from a European Collaboration

OVERVIEW OF SYMPOSIUM

The symposium aims to explore different dimensions of implementing e-learning as revealed through narrative accounts from a diverse range of sources within 7 European universities. All papers are connected through the authors' collaboration in the EQUEL project, E-quality in E-learning funded by the EU Commssion E-learning initiative. The EQUEL project has established a special interest group with an interest in the implementation of e-learning from an institutional perspective.

The special interest group comprises researchers and developers from the Institut de Pédagogie universitaire et des Multimédias, University of Louvain Belgium; Laboratoire de Soutien à l'Enseignement Télématique, University of Liège, Belgium; Virtual Campus, E.M-Lyon, France; Centre for Higher Education Development, Coventry University, UK; Centre for Academic Practice, University of Warwick, UK; New Technologies for Education Centre, Fribourg University, Switzerland, Institutionen för pedagogik och didaktik, University of Goteborg, Sweden. Each one of these institutions has engaged in e-learning implementation with a unique rationale, overall strategy and set of technological and pedagogical tools at its disposal. The collaborative activity of the research group has uncovered and built new shared understandings about the factors influencing e-learning developments within and across our individual cultural domains.

As well as gathering published guidelines, case studies and interviews on issues relating to institutional implementation (Charlier, B. et al, 2002, Deepwell, 2002, IVETTE, 2002) the group has also generated a set of stories of e-learning implementation that represent different organisational layers across a number of institutions. The stories and interviews we have gathered are in many cases informed by the appreciative inquiry mode of action research (Ludema, 2001) where we have sought to celebrate the "power of the unconditional positive question" as a break from deficit vocabulary and constructs.

The forms of the stories are varied (dialogues, short accounts, longer interviews, reflective statements) and each story tells of an encounter with e-learning from a personal or group perspective within a given institutional context. The variation in the voice of the story-teller is intended to build a layered approach to the research to incorporate policy, strategy and operation in higher education: EU, national, institutional, departmental, teams, individual practitioners and learners.

The papers of the symposium represent different analyses of this data from varied perspectives and are intended to enable some cross-site generalisations and to generate some further research questions, particularly in relation to institutional strategies and "quality-building" through e-learning. The spectrum covered includes issues of inclusion, resources, adoption patterns, technical infrastructure, policy interventions, quality control as well as contextual and cultural features.

This group is offering four papers to the symposium. The first, by Charlier et al. offers an analysis of success factors in relation to a number of thematic areas, including the development of a resource centre; policies of supporting innovative projects; adoption of a single virtual learning environment; teacher training; collaborations and communication processes. The second, by Courtney, focuses on two developmental projects, similar in many ways and yet markedly different in their potential for sustainability and institutional impact. Through an analysis of the collected personal narratives and wider contextual differences she explores reasons for the discrepancy. The third, by LeBrun, posits a model for organisational development and innovation adoption through a learning model. The fourth paper by Cousin et al proposes an analytic framework as an advance toward a theory of implementation in a currently under-theorised area.

Each of the four papers will offer a 15-20 minute presentation, allowing a short time after each paper for questions. There will be further opportunity to engage with presenters during the EQUEL dissemination event at the conference.

REFERENCES

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