NETWORKED LEARNING CONFERENCE 2002

ABSTRACT of INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PAPER

An Evaluation Instrument for Online Learning and Teaching

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This paper presents interim findings from a project at the University of Derby to identify and disseminate good practice in supporting learning in online provision. Online learning support materials, or whole modules delivered through online or distance learning, have been widely promoted as the leading edge of educational development, yet as Littlejohn (1999:27) et al suggested:

' - many academics have limited conception of how to use the web effectively for teaching and learning'.

One of the challenges facing this project team was how to determine what is 'good' or 'effective' in this context, and because of this early work has focused on the development of an evaluation instrument for online learning and teaching. Elegant technical solutions in themselves may be rewarding for those developing them but they ultimately need to satisfy learner's needs, to be stimulating and motivating, and above all to add value beyond more traditional methods if there is to be a strong rationale for their pedagogic application..

Based on an extensive literature review from the fields of open and distance learning, online teaching and learning support, and online training and development as used in business contexts; the team have developed a simple yet effective evaluation instrument, which was then pilot-tested in a critical review of the early efforts of colleagues across the University. There has also been some limited evaluation work done beyond the University. Later testing will be undertaken in a wider range of contexts, and should include business as well as academic applications. Having established a means of measuring what is effective online learning, the later stages of the project will focus on identifying and disseminating good practice from a range of contexts. Early findings of this activity will be presented at the conference.

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COVER SHEET:

CONTRIBUTION TO SYMPOSIUM ON: E-LEARNING, E-TUTORING, THE E-UNIVERSITY

TITLE OF PAPER: An evaluation instrument for online learning and teaching

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INSTITUTION; University of Derby

SESSION TYPE: Individual Conference Paper

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Number of words;   330

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