Contribution to Symposium on: e-learning, e-tutoring, e-university

Title of Paper: Promoting 'Best Practice' for E-tutoring through Staff
                       Development

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ABSTRACT

Throughout my recent studies for the MA in Open and Distance Education from the Open University, a fully online course, I became more and more aware of the importance of the tutor and the impact that he/she can have in any distance education (DE) course. This awareness didn't just arise from what I was learning from the course materials but from my own experiences of being a distance learner. Time and time again it struck me that no matter whether we are considering issues of learner support, course design, course development, quality assurance, etc, the role of the tutor is vital to the success of any DE course. Yet, many HEIs offer no staff development or training for face-to-face teaching staff adopting this important role. From information gleaned from a survey undertaken as part of my MA project, it was clear that many traditional face-to-face teaching staff had received no professional development or training for their new role of online tutor. Indeed, of those surveyed, only 5% of academic staff indicated that they had received any development/training in how to *teach* in the online environment. 80% of academic staff indicated that they had received limited training in how to use the technology.

The continuous stampede into the distance learning market combined with the introduction of virtual learning environments into on-campus courses in order to increase student numbers, widen access and meet the demands of lifelong learning, now places greater demands on face-to-face teaching staff. However, the cyberspace classroom is quite different from that of the face-to-face classroom and substantial pedagogical shifts will be required for successful online learning. But what is being done to help traditional teaching staff cope with these new pedagogical shifts? How will traditional teaching staff move from teaching in front of a class to teaching in the online environment? This paper will present the arguments that suggest that there is a need for staff who have only taught in the face-to-face situation to receive comprehensive training for their new role if they are to meet the challenges and demands that online learning/teaching presents.

The paper will give a brief introduction to the concept of DE along with an overview of the present teaching 'role' in HE. It will then continue by presenting various arguments on why staff development/training is necessary for e-tutoring, what type of training should take place and the cultural implications that this places on higher education institutions (HEIs) implementing DE programmes.