

TITLE OF PAPER: “Supporting Institutional Change: An experiment in computer supported collaborative learning - a report on research in progress”

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CONFERENCE THEME: methodologies for researching e-learning.

PROPOSAL:

The paper will commence with a short introduction outlining the institutional context within which networked-learning developments are occurring at the University of the West of England. In particular, emphasis will be placed on aspects of change management within a highly decentralised structure through the *Networked Learning Support Framework*.

The second, more substantive, part of the paper will report on research in progress in the Business School under the umbrella of the Networked Learning Support Framework. The research is an Action Research project to intervene in a specific context – a 750 student, level one, undergraduate Organisation Studies module, to learn i.e. with a view to improve practice and to generate generalisations for wider organisational application.

The research is an on-going case of reflective practice over the three years of the module. The first two being the subject of a research project which identified the following student issues when participating in assessed group work:

- task organisation issues
- group process / interpersonal issues

From the first project emerged an interest in the degree to which e-learning technology may offer solutions to these issues given their potential to facilitate interactive and collaborative learning. Current module web provision was in terms of Mason's (1998) 'content and support' model, the aim now being to move towards the 'integrated' model.

Research aim:

To research the possible explanations which account for the different ways in which student groups function when undertaking a collaborative research project with one of three possible models of group interaction:

1. Traditional. 50 students in 5 x 10 groups

The group meets face to face and in real time, supported by traditional communications. Students keep minutes of group meetings, complete individual learning logs which record their experience of group work and produce a group report of their research findings.

2. Virtual. 50 students in 5 x 10 groups

The group meets via VLE group functions, communications are synchronous and/ or asynchronous. Document writing and exchange is via the website. There is on-line monitoring of group meetings and communications. Students complete individual learning logs and the group produces a report of their research findings.

3. Supplementary. 50 students in 5 x 10 groups

The group has the option to meet face to face or to make use of some, or all, of the VLE group functions. There is on-line monitoring of group meetings and communications. Students keep minutes of group meetings, complete individual learning logs and produce a group report of their research findings.

The lived experience of the students is captured over the term that is allowed for the completion of the group research project through monitoring at three points: initial reactions, mid point experience, and end reflections on the experience of group work in the chosen form.

The effectiveness of the groups is measured in terms of the three outcomes:

- task achievement – assessment mark awarded in the group assignment
- satisfaction – student rating of the experience of group work
- group interactions – number and nature of meetings, communications, and on-line interactions.

Additionally, two possible explanations for the differences in outcomes will be investigated:

- individual student learning approaches, measured by the Approaches to Study Inventory (Tait & Entwistle, 1995)
- type of group – traditional, virtual, supplementary.