

Developing practice in online synchronous tuition

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Developing practice in online synchronous tuition by peer observation, feedback and reflection

Overview

Current training and development for online synchronous tuition (using systems such as Elluminate Live!) tends to focus on technical usage rather than pedagogy. The aim of this project is to develop an environment where tutorial staff for Physical Science modules are encouraged to develop their practice in the online environment by a process of peer observation, feedback and reflection.

The plan

The project would carry out a peer-supported development exercise with 22 Associate Lecturers in 2012. We have an expectation that this process will both develop skills and highlight areas where further staff development can be targeted. There is a variety of practice within the cohort of Associate Lecturers who are already teaching through this medium, and so sharing of good practice would clearly be desirable. However, a feature of synchronous online tuition is the relatively low level of student interaction. The peer observation and feedback process will be designed to encourage ALs to consider how to increase student interactivity. By collating the experiences of peer groups, we would produce a working guide for online tuition in Physical Science. The project will also assess the effectiveness of peer-support as a developmental tool for synchronous tuition, and will report on its findings.

The project should be of direct benefit to students studying these modules as it is likely to enhance the tutorial provision, but it will also inform the University's view of how to effectively develop staff in using synchronous tuition systems.

Deliverables and outcomes

Two distinct reports are expected from this project:

- 1) A report on emerging best practice for ALs on these particular modules – this will have a distinct use for Science ALs and module teams in understanding how to use synchronous communication tools to best support students.
- 2) A report on the evaluation of whether a peer feedback process is an effective development tool in the context of online synchronous tuition. This will be of interest to academics and academic managers with an interest in the development of online learning.

Project milestones

In chronological order, the project comprises the following phases:

Design phase

A peer observation and feedback exercise will be designed, drawing on ideas of how peer observation has been used to develop practice in the face-to-face tutorial setting. This will be presented to ALs by November 2011, and refined ready for implementation in February 2012.

Baseline study

The baseline study will aim to determine current practice in the use of Elluminate. It is likely that this will be based on recordings of sessions. It will potentially involve all 22 ALs on level-3 physical science modules and will be conducted from Sep – Nov 2011.

Peer observation, feedback and reflection exercise

We expect that the peer observation and feedback exercise would take place between Feb – May 2012. It is likely that the process would be concluded with a group feedback (online) event in June 2012 which would focus on common themes emerging from individual experiences. These themes need to be captured and reported on. This report on emergent practice would be produced by July 2012.

Follow-up study

Following the conclusion of the peer feedback exercise, the effect of this approach will be evaluated. It is likely that there will be further structured conversations with ALs who took part in the exercise. The conversations will be held in the period Jul-Sep 2012.

Presentation of outcomes

A report on the impact of the peer feedback process is expected to be presented in Autumn 2012.

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