Enhancing Curriculum Delivery Through New Technologies

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This paper reports on the integration of e-book readers, Second Life and Podcasting into curriculum delivery to enhance the work-based experience of learners studying at a distance. The study is part of a JISC-funded research project called DUCKLING (Delivery University Curricula: Knowledge, Learning and INnovation Gains - http://www.le.ac.uk/beyonddistance/duckling/).

The University of Leicester currently has more than 7000 distance learning students, mainly on work-related Masters’ degrees. The DUCKLING project runs within three distance learning Masters’ programmes in Applied Linguistics & TESOL and Occupational Psychology during 2009 and 2010. Both disciplines face similar curriculum delivery challenges, such as increasing flexibility and mobility, engaging time-poor students, enhancing student-student and teacher-student interaction through collaborative learning activities and improving the relevance of the content and activities to learners’ contexts. To address these challenges, three technologies are being researched: Podcasting, Second Life (SL) and e-book readers. For example, the use of e-book readers is being researched in terms of their potential to increase mobility and interaction with selected writings. Podcasts are used to offer dissertation guidance, assessment feedback, module overviews, explanations of threshold concepts, and illustrations of the way English was spoken in different periods in history and in different countries. Approaches for using SL under consideration include induction, dissertation supervision and role-plays.

DUCKLING makes use of an Action Research methodology that involves the ‘action-reflection’ cycle (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006 p.9). Data are collected via interviews, observation, online questionnaires and through the artefacts themselves (i.e. the actual podcasts, e-book materials and SL activities). The data analysis includes cognitive mapping, a technique used to capture a unique ‘map’ of an individual and his or her change in views, perceptions and experiences over the two-year period. The methodology is grounded in Kelly’s theories of personal constructs (Kelly, 1955) and supported by software called Decision Explorer (http://www.banxia.com/demain.html).

The DUCKLING project is currently in progress. The delivery of the first technology-enhanced curriculum started in March 2009. This presentation summarises the key interim project findings in terms of curriculum delivery within the DUCKLING project, as well as the main challenges so far identified.

References:
