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New approaches, new vision: capturing teacher experiences in a brave new online world

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The paper is an exploration of how a group of tutors involved in a major e-learning project reacted to developing and teaching in this environment for this first time. All were experienced face-to-face teachers but had different levels of experience in using technology. Our aim was to capture their individual views on working in an online environment. The import of this cannot be under-estimated, as different views on learning influence the role and potential of technology in an e-learning environment.

As the research is an exploration in understanding the impact that e-learning can have on the role of the teacher, it seemed appropriate to frame the work in a grounded theory approach and to deal with themes as they emerged. The data for the paper are the product of focus groups, questionnaires and observation. The sample for data collection was the total population of tutors in seven institutions involved in the delivery of the course. The questionnaire captured tutors' profiles (experience of information technology, e-moderating, e-learning, gender, college, module taught), their personal online tutoring style, their opinions on pedagogy and the student learning experience, training and development issues and general reflections on being an online tutor. The initial findings reveal varied reasons for becoming involved with online learning and a wide variety of styles for interacting online with students. All respondents were keen to keep an element of face-to-face teaching in their modules and felt it was difficult to gauge depth of learning without 'normal face-to-face interactions at some point'. A number of staff felt that e-delivery is much more difficult than they envisaged and challenged them in ways that face-to-face teaching did not. Materials and approaches that work well in a classroom environment are not always effective online. Tutors faced challenges in both design and delivery.

Keywords: *Blended learning; Role of teachers*

Introduction

There is a compelling argument that, as the art of learning and teaching itself changes to address the new profile of the online learning environment, a reappraisal

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of the role of the teacher is required (Salmon, 2000; Bonk, 2003; Jones, 2004). This is particularly true in e-learning, which has become a key component in pedagogy (Singh *et al.*, 2002) and has re-awakened debates about the nature of learning and teaching. e-Learning clearly creates new roles for teachers such as e-authoring and e-moderating (for example, Berge & Collins, 1995; Mason, 1998; Salmon, 2000; Anderson *et al.*, 2001; Laurillard, 2002; Bonk, 2003; Garrison & Anderson, 2003), posing challenging educational questions for pedagogy and the curriculum. This is in part because e-learning is not simply a matter of taking traditional teaching materials and making them available electronically; instead, it invites critical pedagogical, technological and organizational reflection and change (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998; Bonk, 2003; Jochems *et al.*, 2003; Westera, 2004). Adams (2004) highlights two components in computer-based learning, namely technology and 'underware' (i.e. the pedagogy that underpins the development of a course). She argues that the pedagogy is the most important component, as this determines student engagement. Jones (2004) stressed that university leaders should view information and communications technology as a lever for re-engineering a curriculum based on new pedagogies, which are collaborative and constructivist. Weller (2002, p. 21) warns that:

> In order to successfully deliver an online course, it requires a strong pedagogical strategy. This may require much more thought and reflection than is perhaps given to a traditional lecture series.

The situation at present in many UK universities is that most lecturers focus on content, are experienced in face-to-face (f2f) teaching, have little pedagogical training (although this is changing) and experience of facilitating learners online. Hodgson and Watland (2004, p. 115) highlight this concern, arguing that research '… needs to take greater account of the core issues of epistemology and pedagogy as these remain largely under-investigated'. Conrad (2004, p. 31) reveals a similar pattern in teachers at a Canadian university: '… instructors had very little knowledge of the new medium … and relied heavily on their f2f experiences … they revealed very little awareness of issues of collaborative learning'. In turn, Blass and Davies (2003, p. 28) stress that '(m)any universities are embracing e-learning in one form or another without really getting to grips with the extent of the paradigm shift required to make e-learning a success'.

While engaging with pedagogy afresh is clearly significant, the process through which teachers actually come to this is interesting and not without issue. The aim of the paper is to explore how a group of teachers involved in a major e-learning project reacted to developing courses online and teaching in this environment for this first time. More specifically, the paper provides an account of the learning experience of these teachers.

Context

The context for this study is a suite of blended learning courses ranging from a Master's degree through an undergraduate programme to a Foundation degree in

business education focusing on enterprise and professional development. The Foundation degree is a vocational two-year programme at subdegree level. The philosophy of the Foundation degree is rooted in vocational relevance and is designed to facilitate the acquisition, development and application of common (interpersonal) skills and competencies in the context of work related activities. The courses were developed at the University of Glamorgan and delivered through a network of the university and six further education colleges (FECs) in Wales. In further education, although the environment is post compulsory education, there are differences in working practices and level of courses. When compared with higher education, staff in FECs have larger teaching timetables, different terms and different expertise. The Quality Assurance Agency (2006) paper *Learning from Higher Education in Further Education Colleges 2003–2005* reported on FECs' heavy and demanding teaching load that could impact unfavourably on aspects of their higher education work, and also the heavy use of part-time staff who may be unable to benefit from the same staff development and support opportunities as full-time staff.

The project aimed to provide an accessible, innovative, online learning environment for students interested in acquiring and developing entrepreneurial and business knowledge and skills, but also provide f2f opportunities through the university and FECs. Its goal was to provide new routes of access to better skills, employability, qualifications and business profitability. The skills included enhanced problem-solving, evaluation and creative thinking. Given this, modules were designed in a constructivist spirit, incorporating discussion boards and online collaboration so that knowledge could be socially constructed and utilize actively participants' experience. In general, for a series of pragmatic reasons, the module content was determined within the university, with little contribution from the further education staff.

There were subtle but important differences in the delivery of each course, reflecting the initial assumptions of university staff who developed the course. For example, at Master's level tutors believed that discussion boards would be used more extensively as students could utilize their experience and knowledge. While students on the undergraduate programmes were expected also to use discussion boards, it was felt that this group might need more scaffolding of their learning. The teaching and learning experience was delivered through 'Blackboard', the chosen virtual learning environment, and an in-house content management system that matured as the project developed. The screen had clear links to course materials, resources (library and links), assessment, communications (discussion boards, virtual classroom and email), assessments and tutors' profiles.

Profile of tutors and students

Although the majority of tutors had information technology (IT) skills, these were in the area of using IT for administration and email communication. Few had experience of designing courses or tutoring online. Seventy-two per cent of the tutors felt that they had good general IT skills and the remaining 28% saw the project as an opportunity to develop their IT skills. Female tutors (88%) were more confident

about their IT literacy prior to the project than their male colleagues (48%). For the majority of staff, this was their first experience of online delivery.

We recognize that tutors' reaction may well reflect the responses of the students and hence it is useful to indicate some features of the students. The project identified a wide range of potential groups for the courses, including young entrepreneurs in the 18–25 age range, unemployed persons, individuals in small and medium business enterprises looking for a formal qualification and women returning to study. Many of these students had limited experience of e-learning, and a number had very limited knowledge of using computers. The courses hence attracted a large percentage of students from a non-traditional background. At the time of this study, the average age of male students was 42 years and the average age of female students was 37 years.

Methodology and data collection

We used a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a qualitative framework sympathetic to an exploratory situation. This approach also allowed us to reflect on the learning of teachers as the project developed and to capture some of the dynamic involved. The primary aim was to understand the situation and develop the theory implicit in the data by capturing the reflections of all the teaching staff from all the institutions involved in the project and to highlight any significant differences of approach and experience. Data collection involved focus groups, questionnaires and observation using the total number of staff as the population. Table 1 outlines the data collection methods.

Table 1. Data collection methods

Technique	Rationale	Sample
Tutor focus groups	To explore issues in more in depth in a f2f environment To enable interaction and discussion between participants. This stimulates ideas and reflections	Six focus groups across the network
Tutors' questionnaire	To provide a profile of online teaching tutors To ascertain what levels of importance tutors assign various aspects of the learning experience	Questionnaire sent to all online tutors
Minutes of meetings	To provide an ongoing account of tutors' concerns. Tutors from the university and the FECs met monthly. The project group met weekly	Data available for all meetings
Observation of Blackboard data	To monitor student and tutor interaction with course materials and to collect statistical data	Data available for all modules
Student questionnaires and focus groups	To consider data from a parallel study that captured the student experience and tie this in with staff reflections	Questionnaires sent to all students. Representative sample of focus groups

The sampling approach used the whole population of teachers involved with the project across the network for the focus groups and questionnaire. The researchers travelled to each college to conduct the focus groups. It was possible to observe online interactions between tutors and students in a representative sample of modules, which had been identified from the analysis of teacher questionnaires and from a parallel study that considered the student experience. The researchers discussed the idea of a virtual focus group but teachers were apprehensive about an online discussion group environment. One of the researchers attended all weekly meetings of the project group at the university and the monthly meetings combining higher education with the further education partners.

The tutors were encouraged to critically reflect on their experiences and identify the major challenges. The questionnaire contained closed and open questions and considered their experience to date, their personal styles of e-moderating, attitudes to their role, student issues, staff development and their feelings about e-learning and its potential. Data from a previously conducted student questionnaire was used where appropriate to corroborate teacher observations of their role. In parallel, data was also collected from focus groups that were fully transcribed to pursue issues in more depth.

The coding procedures divided the data into manageable segments, identified 'phenomena', and classified them into categories and then subcategories through axial coding. These were discussed and amended by the research team and went through a number of iterations before the final version (which appears in Figure 1). The challenges to the teacher centred on flexibility, assessment approaches, support

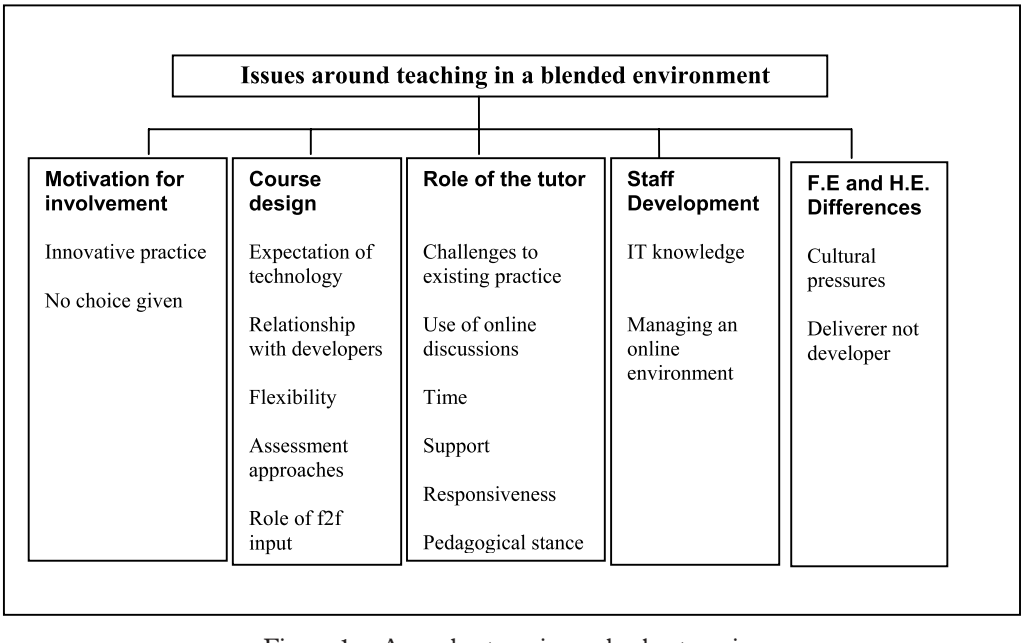

Figure 1. Agreed categories and subcategories

and motivation, using a blended approach, staff development and managing online interaction. The next section of the paper addresses the themes that arose during the data collection.

Results

The results in this paper are rooted in the two main criteria that Glaser (1992) suggests for judging the adequacy of using a grounded approach, in that it fits the situation and that it helps the people in the situation to make sense of their experience and to manage the situation better. From a population of 37 tutors, 89% responded (33 responses: 17 females and 16 males) from across the network to the questionnaire. Staff from every partner college attended a focus group; this added more depth to the data and provided some very valuable qualitative responses. The response rate of the focus groups was good across the network. Seventy-six per cent of tutors attended a focus group. Only one college did not participate, due to logistical issues, but the questionnaire captured responses from all colleges.

The categories discussed below emerged from the data. Following the system recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1994) and Corbin and Strauss (2003), the phenomena were split into five categories that expanded into key subcategories.

Motivation for involvement

Generally, tutors welcomed the opportunity of becoming involved with an innovative programme, developing new skills and exploring different teaching methods. One tutor summed up these responses by saying:

> I recognised the potential of e-learning and want to improve IT skills. I hope to improve my competence in distance learning support, try something new, and apply wide and in depth tutor experience to new context.

A small minority (12%) of tutors were less enthusiastic and only became involved because their module had been included in the new degree because of management decisions. This lack of motivation by these tutors resulted in some of them only engaging minimally in the online teaching, something that ultimately affected retention. There was a higher level of non-completion and student drop-out in the colleges where the online discussions had not been supported fully by the tutors.

Course design and organization

All the tutors were experienced in designing and developing modules for traditionally delivered courses. However, one cannot take a traditionally delivered course and put it online without major considerations of design and organization. The reality of confronting a new world offers interesting perspectives. Tutors had to take on a different role to one they were used to and felt that they did not have ultimate control over their material. At the start of the project, some tutors were disappointed when they

saw their material online and expected 'more bells and whistles'. The original modules were quite text based but, as the relationship with instructional designers and multimedia specialists matured, tutors became more aware of what could be done with their modules, course content began to change and tutors could start to think about ways in which their modules could be more interactive and engaging. This was a significant change in their role and initially caused tension and needed appropriate management. Tutors felt that they were losing control of their module content and their approaches to teaching were being criticized.

As the project progressed, staff realized that they had to rethink approaches to delivery. At the start of the project, flexibility was seen as a key part of the underlying pedagogy and it was decided that students on the undergraduate degree could start all six modules at once if they wished, thus taking control of their own learning experience. However, this was too flexible for staff (and students) to cope with, and the model was altered for the second cohort of students and in subsequent modules for the first cohort so that students followed a linear route within a more structured framework. This raises issues for the way we organize traditional courses. Students from the original cohort were impressed at the responsiveness of the staff to their problems with the initial delivery pattern. Both staff and students felt that, as the course developed, both groups had clearer understanding of this learning environment. This was also highlighted in the way students undertook tasks that were part of the formative assessment. The original aim of the tasks was to replicate a tutorial situation but, if the tutor did not act as facilitator as they would in a f2f tutorial, the students spent a lot of time reflecting on the tasks and perceived it as an over-burdensome assessment. The students complained about the number of tasks and, in particular, tasks not related to the summative assessment. Approaches to assessment were re-evaluated and tutors sought to find the right balance between learning activities and time given for completion. There is, it could be argued, a need to move from teaching content to focus on supporting the learner and, alongside this, the traditional approach to assessment should also change. The assessment focus could be on the 'learning journey' rather than on the 'summative destination'. Assessments must be re-thought so that they engage the learner and use the opportunities afforded by the technology. There were too many tasks unrelated to learning outcomes or assessment and there is a danger that tutors underestimate the time required to undertake these tasks.

The project chose to keep a f2f component through induction and voluntary study sessions. Tutors were supportive of this as it provided a focus and enhanced the students' motivation and learning. As one of them stated, 'e-learning is not just about e'. Tutors felt that it was difficult to gauge the depth of that learning without 'normal f2f interactions at some point'. Thirty-six per cent of tutors felt that a f2f session was important at the start of the course to help students and tutors get to know each other before communicating online. Fifty per cent of staff felt that regular f2f sessions should be built into the programme. This offered reassurance for both tutors and students. Nonetheless, some students were ambivalent about f2f tutorials and felt it appropriate that they received all the teaching online as they could relate well to their fellow students based on discussion board interactions. This divergence in views

highlights one of the difficulties central to all types of teaching; namely, how it is possible to cater for varying student needs, applying pedagogic principles where 'one size fits all', when it is patently obvious that one size most certainly does not fit all? Many tutors commented that the desire for f2f meetings was different with each cohort; but it was important to make it available. As Arbaugh and Benbunan-Fich (2004, p. 121) emphasize: 'a declaration that collaborative constructionism is the only mode for teaching online may unnecessarily disqualify instructors more proficient and very successful on other modes of teaching'. Tutors and students in this study confirm this and felt that the online discussion boards were not the sufficient sole mechanism for debate and discussion for this particular group of students.

The role of the tutor

Through our work with the tutors, it became clear that delivering in an online world presented a number of challenges to existing practice. Although the components are essentially the same (module development; managing learning, student support), the challenges manifest themselves in slightly different ways.

Managing discussions was an issue for tutors (and students). Some modules expected and encouraged the use of discussion boards but the practice among tutors varied. This area revealed how we naturally revert to approaches with which we feel comfortable. There should be clearer specification as to the tutors' role with regard to expectations of moderation, particularly if the argument is put forward that the discussion contributes to the 'level' of the module. Almost one-half of the tutors prioritized the posting of discussion topics throughout the course to keep the students interested in the subject matter. It is clear that online tutors need more input in the early stages to foster trust and develop confidence. Staff found that students were reluctant to use discussion boards and the reasons given for lack of participation included lack of confidence, discussion boards were not linked to the assessment, exclusion by the rest of the group and lack of tutor guidance. The last comment is very significant in our evaluation of the role of the tutor. It is clear that tutors had very different perceptions about how they should interact with students in the online world and expected students to be more active in their communications on discussion boards. Student inactivity in discussion groups is a continuing issue (Arbaugh & Duray, 2002; Bork, 2003).

Developing online discussion and debate appears to be a significant part of the role of the tutor in online teaching. Across all colleges, tutors agreed that it was important that they ensured activity throughout the duration of the module and 85% of tutors felt that their role was key to the success of the students' online experiences—students concurred with this view. The data analysis noted some gender differences. Female tutors (94%) were more confident about their ability to encourage interaction between students than male tutors (75%), and were likely to sum up and archive discussions more frequently than male tutors and were more likely to give specific times when online. If online interactivity is perceived to be an important feature of the courses in the future, then this must be addressed through staff development and course design.

The demand on time was a constant issue. Staff were allocated four to six hours to support a module. Most female tutors commented about the difficultly of balancing virtual time with online commitments (88%) compared with (62%) of male tutors, and linked to this is the perception that more female tutors felt that the time spent online was more than expected. Managing time is a challenge for the e-learner and the online tutor. Indeed, some tutors have found that at certain times they needed to spend at least 30 hours per week providing guidance and support to students, including moderating and marking. Practice among tutors varied and students commented on perceived availability and levels of support. It became clear that tutors had a different opinion as to what their role should be.

Most tutors found the online modules more time-consuming than traditional f2f teaching, specifically because of the additional pastoral care and encouragement that some e-learning students require. Most of the students were non-traditional mature students, and therefore required additional support to complete many tasks. It is important to note that initially the students lacked confidence not only in their computing skills but also in their writing skills. An additional issue is that in an online environment, their writing in the discussion board was very transparent and permanent. Indeed, we have also found that this was an inhibitor for staff who undertook our e-moderating course. Apprehension in posting messages online, especially in the early stages of the course, should not be underestimated. Dennen and Bonk (2003) stress the importance of motivating online learners; they see this as a key challenge facing tutors. The tutors expressed the view that e-learning students receive more one-to-one teaching time than students enrolled on traditional courses. Yet 55% of the students surveyed stated that the level of feedback and support from moderators fell short of their expectations. Some students felt they had been promised regular, comprehensive feedback and encouragement regarding their progress, and this had not been forthcoming.

> I liked the moderator who gave us the most feedback, with further comments and questions to keep our threads going and to stimulate further discussions and to make us think laterally and beyond what we said. (Undergraduate student)

This feedback affected the tutors. If the course has online interaction as a central part of its pedagogy, then this should be to foster a sense of community in the students. It may help to incorporate small amounts of interaction in all modules. As one tutor stated:

> My role is to reinforce the feelings of community amongst students and to encourage online participation.

Although most tutors stressed the importance of online interaction to their modules, almost one-third of tutors felt that students should be able to develop their own pedagogy in the spirit of the flexibility that the course marketing material indicated (Figure 2). Tutors in this study used terms such as encourage, facilitate, motivate and inspire in relation to their new role.

Oren *et al.* (2002, p. 13) highlighted the following: 'Despite the widespread view that the constructivist and collaborative approaches are the most appropriate mode

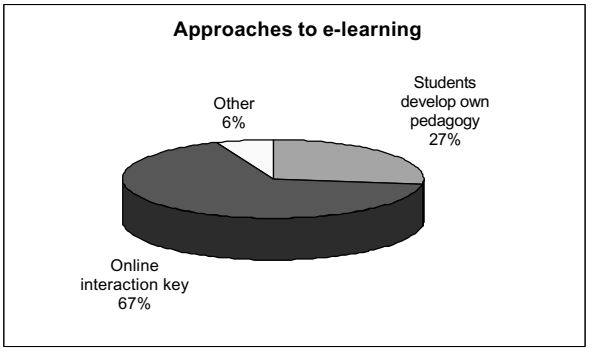

Figure 2. Approaches to e-learning

for managing online discussion groups, the lecturing mode often remains the most common strategy used by instructors to moderate virtual discussions'.

Staff development

There was a major staff development need at the start of the project; as stated earlier, most of the tutors had no prior experience of tutoring online. It was clear that continuous staff development was needed for the tutors to support their learning journey, not least because, as we have indicated above, staff development needs were in some respects unpredictable

Achieving engagement online without the normal visual cues that one relies on in f2f delivery was a major challenge. All tutors undertook an e-moderating module developed at the university before working online. One of the aims of the module was to develop skills in encouraging and supporting learning from a constructivist viewpoint. Most tutors felt that they were equipped to motivate, encourage and develop their students online, something they had been introduced to as part of their initial training and honed through experience. A small percentage of tutors were very confident but most agreed that staff development should be continuous.

Even though a course may be supported by an underpinning philosophy such as constructivism, everyone involved with the design and delivery has their own pedagogy in use, influenced by experience and personal preferences. The dynamics of (official) rhetoric and practices remain an interesting area for study. A key part of any staff development programme should encourage staff to reflect, debate and learn about pedagogical practices.

Further education/higher education differences

> It could be said that H.E. [higher education] has never addressed pedagogy; its priority has always been, and broadly continues to be, research and the subject discipline. Until now, pedagogy has traditionally barely figured in planning or professional development. In F.E. [further education], where learning and teaching have been the prime concerns,

> tutors and resource deficiencies have prevented, and continue to impede, a sustained focus on pedagogy. (JISC, 2003, p. 45)

The university was the focus for the design and the development of the courses. There was some consultation between the colleges involved in the project but this was primarily concerned with delivery. Some staff at the partner colleges felt isolated and not consulted enough on such matters as course authorship. Further education tutors were frustrated at their inability to make small changes to course content, or to find a route whereby they may request changes. This could have been easily incorporated in traditional courses but was more complex with online materials. For example, those in rural localities felt that they would be able to customize case studies and other content that would be more applicable and appropriate to their students.

The style of tutoring online is a personal one and staff had slightly different approaches to working with students. Further education tutors across the network spend slightly more time moderating a module than university tutors. A higher percentage of staff from the FECs said they spent six hours or more online. The majority of staff had to balance online with significant f2f commitments. It was clear that further education tutors saw tutoring online to be on the margins of their overall teaching activities. In addition, when the tutors were e-moderating, other staff did not recognize this as an activity that should be free from interruptions and given the same respect as f2f teaching. Most of the staff in FECs were in multi-occupancy rooms and, in some cases, shared their PC with other staff. In contrast, room occupancy is lower in higher education and all staff had their own personal PC.

Staff workload in FECs was a major issue. Although staff in the focus groups were quite satisfied with the six hours allocated per module for teaching purposes, staff, particularly in FECs, have a concern about balancing online and on-campus commitments in an environment where high f2f teaching hours are the norm. Although there may be an advantage in that the teaching is more flexible as the course was asynchronous, the tutor could choose the hours to go online. There is also a disadvantage as sometimes supporting e-learning is invisible. Staff in the FECs in particular revealed many examples of institutional distractions when f2f teaching was given precedence over online teaching. Indeed, many of the tutors felt that the project was marginalized in their colleges.

Just as students have differing approaches to e-learning, so there are differing e-teaching practices in different colleges—and this was discussed in the focus groups. In one college, f2f sessions were offered every week; in two colleges, tutors gave their students printed versions of the online materials and reverted to a method of delivery with which they were more comfortable. Tutors took pragmatic decisions about their teaching and, when there were problems, typically regressed to their preferred methods, although there was commitment to online delivery and, in fact, further education staff (66%) were more strongly committed to the centrality of online interaction as a key feature of e-learning compared with (12%) of university tutors. This may be because the further education staff had more opportunity to express their ideas in the online discussions while the university tutors who had authored the content already had a voice.

Conclusions

Strauss and Corbin (1994) argue that 'grounded theories', because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding and provide a meaningful guide to action. For most of the tutors and students, this project was their first experience of teaching and learning in an online environment, and a grounded theory study revealed some of the challenges that tutors experienced becoming online teachers in this particular project and the ways in which their role changed. The changes involved the development of teaching materials, discovering how to transfer and translate existing skills and knowledge into the online environment, understanding the strengths and weakness of the online environment, understanding and supporting the online learner and having to actively reflect on and act on personal pedagogic approaches to develop an appropriate blend.

Specifically, the major challenges to tutors were their perceived diminishing control of module design as a result of the involvement of instructional designers. Tutors' flexibility to make changes to their modules was reduced, as this involved extra resource from the technical team. Further education staff felt the lack of control and reduced flexibility even more strongly than those in higher education. The original aim of the project was to build the course around a constructivist approach. In reality, the project employed a hybrid of constructivist and behaviourist approaches, driven by student and tutor demand, as both groups gradually learned to understand their roles in this environment. This group of non-traditional students demanded more guidance than was envisaged and tutors delivered in styles that suited their own personal pedagogy. All respondents were keen to keep an element of f2f teaching in their modules and felt it was difficult to gauge depth of learning without 'normal f2f interactions at some point'. This may change with different groups of students and, indeed, as tutors become more comfortable in the environment. A number of tutors felt that e-learning was much more difficult than envisaged and challenged them in ways that f2f teaching did not. Some materials and approaches that worked well in a classroom environment were not effectively replicated online, to the evident disappointment of some tutors. Tutors faced challenges in both design and delivery. Tutors found the management of discussion boards challenging, although there were some gender differences with female tutors being more confident about their ability to encourage discussions online. If tutors remain rooted in a teacher-centred pedagogy they will not be making full use of the interactive facilities provided in the virtual learning environment. Conversely, some tutors went to the other extreme and did not provide sufficient support. Tutors need to develop a good understanding of the technological affordances, integrating them into the pedagogical model employed. Placing text on the Web is not making the best use of the interactive and multimedia-rich technology. At present, many tutors in the project are resisting a more constructivist approach. The outcome is replicated in the literature; for example, Sumner (2000) and Oren *et al.* (2002). There is continuing and clear evidence that there is a gap between the rhetoric of the need to adopt learner-centred, constructivist approaches and the reality.

Coping with these challenges is achievable through experience, raised awareness and a staff development programme that supports and guides the teacher. This demands careful and sympathetic management. Both opportunity and encouragement must be provided for tutors to reflect not only on course content, but also on teaching and assessment approaches. There is a major staff development agenda underpinning the challenges identified in the paper.

By grounding this analysis in practical, real experience, this paper moves the discussion forward. Laurillard (2002) gives valuable advice emphasizing that the first execution of an e-learning programme rarely works as well. She recommends that we, as academics, build a body of knowledge on how we could make best use of technology in learning. Online learning is offering us the opportunity to evaluate critically our pedagogies and our role as educator. Tutors globally are still exploring the best way forward. The paper highlights some aspects of the changing role of the teacher and acknowledges that one of the problems facing tutors at this time is that they need to be ready for the next educational development while responding to the needs of learners today. It is important that academics share their experiences in order to build an account of practice in the growing debate on online learning and teaching and the role of the teacher.

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