

JISC

Effective Practice with e-Learning

An abstract, artistic composition featuring overlapping playing cards, primarily the Ace of Hearts and Ace of Clubs, set against a background of soft, glowing blue and purple light rays and geometric shapes. The cards are slightly blurred and layered, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Case Studies

Apply concepts and skills

The Working Men's College (WMC)

Apply concepts and skills

What is the intended outcome?

Learners apply knowledge and newly acquired skills through active participation.

What is established practice?

- Practitioners demonstrate skills in context and set associated tasks
- Practitioners adapt tasks to the existing competences of learners
- Practitioners build up learners' skills in sequences of smaller steps on which later knowledge and skills depend
- Learners develop skills of their own through repetitive and progressive tasks

What advantages can e-learning bring?

- Learners can be effectively motivated towards skills acquisition that requires repetition when they are participating kinaesthetically, for example, through using an interactive whiteboard and voting system
- Use of images and audio files can support the development of conceptual learning
- All learners can participate in group tasks through the use of wireless technologies (for example, a wireless keyboard and mouse), or electronic voting devices
- Increasing learners' active participation may have an impact on their ability to learn and may improve retention and achievement

Learning through doing

The Working Men's College (WMC)

Background

The Working Men's College (WMC) situated in Camden, North London, is the oldest surviving adult education institution in Europe. Originally associated with the Co-operative Movement, today it is a true community college, where development continues to be rooted in the liberal education tradition of the Workers' Educational Association.

The challenge

Adult and community learning provision at the College is co-ordinated through an outreach initiative. Classes have been established at over 15 locations and serve a wide variety of communities including Chinese, Somali, and Filipino, together with homeless and refugees' associations. Traditionally, however, recruitment and retention among learners from wide-ranging ethnic backgrounds has proved problematic.

The e-learning advantage

Michael McCombe, ICT Programme Manager at WMC, believes that e-learning offers learners more control over their learning, thus improving retention. As part of the audit process for developing e-learning, he looked at a number of initiatives. One of those considered was Classroom Performance System (CPS) which can be used in conjunction with a computer and interactive whiteboard.

Experience shows that multi-lingual ESOL groups benefit most if the full range of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic principles are incorporated into lessons. The system includes a hand-held interactive voting device which links to software installed on the tutor's computer. It allows images, along with related questions and answers, to be projected on to the whiteboard. Each learner has their own hand-held unit

Everyday life scenarios are frequently used on ESOL courses to promote use of language and reinforce understanding. At The Working Men's College, e-learning has been incorporated into lessons to deliver learning through these scenarios in an interactive and engaging way.

at their desk and uses this to answer questions – numbers on the remote control correspond to particular answers. Responses are tallied by computer and feedback is instantly available to the whole class. This enables the tutor to elicit a response from every learner simultaneously, without embarrassing anyone who selects the wrong answer. Learning is fun but also highly productive.

Everyday life scenarios are frequently used on ESOL courses to promote language development. A typical example is a lesson where learners must create a shopping list and decide which shops they need to visit. Individual members of the class write items up on the whiteboard. The shopping list is then saved by the system and can be linked with the next stage of the lesson.

The practitioner then displays images alongside pre-prepared questions, relating them back to the shopping list created earlier. The questions are displayed on the board and the whole class reads through them together, with the aid of word highlighting. The group is then asked to vote for the correct answer. A non-threatening environment is created which encourages all learners to participate.

Key points for effective practice

- Opportunities for feedback should be provided to allow learners to understand where they went wrong. The use of repetition through further activities can, however, be fun with new technologies.
- Simple ideas can be effectively transposed into learning activities. New users should not be afraid to start with simple but effective solutions.

Final word

Since introducing the system, recruitment and attendance on the courses using this technology has improved, while retention has markedly increased. Many learners have expressed a view that their new found skills has given them a sense of freedom, widening horizons for many who felt disenfranchised.

