

Chapter XIII

Evaluating the Geography E–Learning Materials and Activities: Student and Staff Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is concerned with the evaluation of learning materials and activities developed as part of the DialogPLUS project. A range of evaluation activities was undertaken, focusing on the experiences of students, teaching staff, and the entire project team. Student evaluations included both quantitative and qualitative approaches, particularly using a questionnaire design drawing on a specific methodology and generic quality criteria, facilitating comparative analysis of results. Discussion of the student evaluations is focused on specific taught modules from both human and physical geography. Results of these evaluations were discussed with teaching staff and contributed to improvements in the various online resources. Both internal and external evaluators were involved in interviewing key project staff and their different perspectives are presented. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the effectiveness and impact of different DialogPLUS activities, highlighting the principal impacts of the project as perceived by the students and staff involved.

INTRODUCTION

Earlier chapters in this book describe and discuss some of the online materials and activities developed under the auspices of the DialogPLUS project, to enhance learning for geography students. Student-focused evaluation of these innovations involved quantitative and qualitative methods, including questionnaires, observation, interviews, and analysis of online discussion board activity. The questionnaire design drew on a specific methodology and generic qual-

ity criteria, facilitating comparative analysis of results. Teaching staff were invited to add any questions of particular interest and preliminary findings from the analysis were discussed with them. Their reflections informed the final evaluation reports, which in turn led to improvements in the resources. Additionally, towards the end of the three-year development phase, key project staff were interviewed about their experiences by both internal and external evaluators. This chapter describes and discusses the approaches to, and results of, both student and staff-focused

Table 1. DialogPLUS stakeholder groups, their interests and concerns

Stakeholders	Interests and concerns
Geographers at partner institutions	Relevance and value of the project to their local context. Access to digital library resources. Barriers and enablers to nugget development, usage and sharing. Effectiveness of nuggets in their local learning & teaching context. Collaborative nature of the project and how it has worked. Usability and effectiveness of the toolkit. Embedding of outputs / outcomes. Changes to professional practice resulting from involvement in the project.
Learners at partner institutions	The kind of skill or conceptual understanding needed to use the nuggets. Accessibility of resources / nuggets. Effectiveness of resources / nuggets. Impact on their learning processes and outcomes.
Computer scientists and educational technologists at partner institutions	Barriers and enablers to development of the toolkit. Usability and effectiveness of the toolkit. Barriers and enablers to developing systems for nugget sharing. Usability and effectiveness of solutions for nugget sharing. Convergence with emerging standards in learning design, interoperability, resource discovery and reuse.
Educationists and the evaluation team	Innovation in teaching and learning. Pedagogical soundness of the toolkit. Barriers and enablers to changing practice. Effectiveness of the evaluation methodology adopted. Evaluation findings and their relevance.
Project team	Ensuring that the project is successfully completed on time and to budget and meets the original aims and objectives of the proposal. Facilitating communication between partners. Monitoring of project activities against project plan. Collaborative nature of the project and how it has worked.
Institutional managers	Successful project completion. Usability and effectiveness of project outcomes.
Funding bodies	Value of the collaboration. Synergies between related JISC/NSF projects and programmes. Applicability and transferability of the outcomes to the wider community.
The Higher Education community	Project contribution in the areas of digital resources / repositories, distributed learning design, development and implementation, international collaboration, teaching and learning in Geography at tertiary level.

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