

# Chapter XIV

## Reflections, Lessons Learnt, and Conclusions

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this book we have illustrated the materials, software, and experience of developing and delivering geography e-learning courses and learning activities. In this chapter we summarize how the teaching of a variety of geography topics has benefited from the following set of activities: creating media-rich online materials that take full advantage of linking to digital libraries; developing and adapting online, collaborative, and design software; and internationalizing materials through geography teachers in different countries working together. We take a moment to reflect on the experience of material development and the prospects for facilitating exchange of resources and student access. We provide advice to the aspiring geography e-tutor and describe how to access the wealth of materials that have been introduced in the preceding chapters. We then explain how the materials created will continue to be relevant beyond this book. We envisage that teachers, including ourselves, will download and then adapt the materials, borrowing content, techniques for presentation, or learning style. There will be an ongoing process of teaching and review that incorporates tutor and student feedback. The material, its delivery, and its style will not remain static but we hope new developments will be shared via learning*

*repositories. It is important to sustain good online resources. This can be achieved by readers updating the geography e-learning materials and depositing improved versions in the new UK academic learning material depository Jorum.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The preceding chapters document the exposure of a diverse group of university geography teachers to a wide range of e-learning tools and approaches. The academic geographers among the contributors to this volume remained throughout the DialogPLUS project far from the view that just because a particular technology could be applied to the teaching situation, it should be done. Some of these teachers were sympathetic from the start, perceiving the possibility that e-learning might offer approaches to tackling recognized challenges in their traditional teaching, while others have become involved through interest in the first round experiments of their colleagues.

Our evaluation of the many project outcomes has necessarily employed a variety of approaches. These include careful scrutiny of the standard student course evaluations required by our universities and additional evaluation exercises conducted as part of the project and summarized in Chapter XIII. Standard evaluations are helpful in so far as they tell us about the specific success or otherwise of teaching innovations in a specific context, but they are inherently limited because a single cohort of students only ever experiences our teaching in one way. Students bring their own set of expectations and competencies and are not able to compare their experience with that of earlier cohorts who have been taught the same or similar courses, using different methods.

In addition to these student evaluations, interviews with geography academics and learning technologists have been an integral part of the project's progress and the reflection involved in preparation of this text provides a further important aspect of our evaluation. It is entirely possible for the teacher to misinterpret the experience of

a specific student cohort, yet these reflections do have the great advantage of providing context and allowing comparisons to be made with the impact of other approaches, both within the same institution and elsewhere. In forming an overall evaluation, both elements are necessary. In this conclusion we therefore discuss a broad conception of the success of our materials and methods, the effectiveness of our experimentation in learning and teaching, and the success of the learning nuggets, which formed such an important vehicle for our work. In the remaining sections we seek to draw lessons in three domains: collaboration, learning design, and learning delivery.

## **LESSONS FOR COLLABORATION**

A common characteristic of the work described in Chapters I-XIII of this book, dating from the earliest discussions of the DialogPLUS collaborators, has been the concept of the learning “nugget” (Chapter I). From the outset, the underlying reasoning behind the nugget was that it would comprise a recognizable component of learning, less formally defined than a “learning object” (Wiley, 2002). The learning nugget would be readily recognizable by geography teachers and would therefore form a natural basis for the sharing of learning content between individuals and courses. Certainly the nugget concept has proved very useful, providing a common language for teachers to communicate with one another about the elements comprising their courses and the technologies used to support them.

However, one of the original aims of using the exchangeable nugget as a simple vehicle for reuse of learning materials between courses has largely failed and we believe that this experience

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