

**Distributed e-learning in Art, Design, Media: an investigation into current practice**



**Research commissioned by the Art Design Media Subject Centre – Higher Education Academy (ADM-HEA)**

**Research Team:** Cheri Logan: Cumbria Institute of the Arts  
Simon Allan: Cumbria Institute of the Arts  
Anish Kurien: Cumbria Institute of the Arts  
Debbie Flint: ADM-HEA

9. Appendices

**Appendix 1: Distributed e-learning in Art, Design and Media Phase 2 research**

***A Guide to Case Study Research***

		<p><b>E-Spaces: ADM-HEA research into distributed e-learning in art, design and media</b></p>
---	---	---

**Innovation/Development Projects**

**Rationale and context for the activity**

The modern world is dominated by technological developments, the learning potential of which is increasingly recognized. This potential is enhanced by the attractions that new technologies offer, particularly for young people; for example, recent evidence indicates the importance of internet communication for 14- to 21-year-olds and estimates that they spend an average of eight hours a week online (*Guardian*, 7.10.05). It appears that about a third of this time is used for study and research, with a widening range of technologies available to support both educational and leisure activities (*ibid.*). The education community has attempted to keep pace with these developments, and to support

... methods of learning appropriate to this new world, emphasising problem-solving and the application of knowledge, flexibility, creativity and the ability to continue learning after schooling. (McCormick, 1999)

Information technologies provide a rich resource through which these desirable innovations might be made.

The ADM- HEA project into distributed e-learning aims to reflect the different dimensions in which innovation occurs. It involves a national survey, in-depth case studies into innovation/development activities and smaller-scale case studies that will also employ focus group research. The innovation/development projects case will focus on the actualities of teaching and learning, as conducted within the classrooms, studios, technology suites, workshops and other sites in which knowledge is built in art, design and media. The courses, programmes and settings of the creative institutions that provide contexts for this learning are also an important consideration. The research aims to be context-sensitive and to provide reliable accounts of the experiences of those directly experiencing educational and technological change. Above all, it aims to find out how, why and where e-learning is used as an educational resource and to determine users' views of its value and potential.

### **Formulating a research proposal**

In identifying appropriate activities on which to base the research, please bear in mind that they should offer insights into:

- the potential of e-learning to enhance the art, design and media environments in which learning and teaching takes place
- how innovative e-learning can be integrated into existing learning and teaching contexts
- the kinds of subject content and knowledge best supported and delivered through e-media
- the impact of e-learning on the reflective capacity that is a key dimension of understanding in art, design and media
- the range of technologies available, the use made of these and what this suggests about e-learning needs and developments

Those undertaking innovation/development projects are asked to provide a **written proposal** that provides a concise statement about your proposed activity. This should be brief, no more than one A4 side in length, and should include information on:

- Specific context and aims of the activity to be undertaken. Please indicate the timescales you expect to work to and note that it is anticipated that the activity will be of approximately 3 months duration, with reporting to ADM-HEA concluded by 5th May, 2006. February – April 2006 is therefore an appropriate period in which to undertake the activity.
- A budget outline for the activity (enabling you to claim up to £5000 in support costs). Please note any value added that is expected to accrue and also note the contribution that your home institution will make to support the activity.
- A statement about your capacity to deliver the research, for example by referring to former experience in managing/delivering this kind of project or discussing your implementation plan.
- Potential benefits you expect to accrue to the wider community, and the means by which results will be circulated within existing dissemination networks. Please suggest ways in which you are prepared to contribute to ADM-HEA dissemination activities (e.g. in professional forums, debates, presentations).

### **The research activity – getting started**

Writing your proposal is a good way to start off the process, as it enables you to focus on both the theoretical aims and practical issues involved in carrying out the research activity. Following on from this, it is advisable to produce a clear brief for participants in the project, and you may find it useful to engage students and colleagues in the design and evaluation of the activity.

However you devise the brief, please ensure that the activities it outlines have the capability to contribute information and insights that relate to the main research aims of the distributed e-learning project, as outlined above. Your brief should also give those involved a clear outline of the activities they will be engaged in, practical information about implementation and about the amount

of time you expect them to contribute. You need to consider your own time as well and be realistic about what can be achieved within the constraints of a real-life learning and teaching situation.

For more information on how you might conduct your case study research and on the implications of case study as a research method, see the 'Methodology' section below.

### **Writing your report**

Your report should be between 5000 and 7000 words in length, divided into a number of sections. There are aspects that you will probably want to consider under each heading and a format for reporting is therefore suggested, as follows:

#### Executive summary

- A very brief resume of what was attempted, what was found out and an outline of the main recommendations and conclusions (the executive summary is often referred to as a 'snapshot' of the main document).

Introduction and context of the research (only enough for the reader to make sense of what follows)

- What was the project you undertook about?
- Where and when it was undertaken, with a brief description of the circumstances/context.

Research methods employed (concise but necessary information – keep this brief)

- How many respondents there were
- How you collected information (e.g. interviews, observations, questionnaire, research diary entries, focus group sessions etc.)
- How you analysed the information (e.g. you may have found themes that you brought out as headings to explain the findings; you may have arranged your findings according to the different groups of respondents – e.g. tutors' views, students' views etc.)
- Specific reporting on any difficulties you encountered or any problems that affected the project

Findings (this should be the main section of the report, and the lengthiest)

- What you found out from the data you collected
- How you interpreted this – what meanings have you derived from the information you gained?

Conclusions, recommendations and advice to others (second in significance after 'Findings')

- Overall, what do you think the most important aspects are that have emerged?
- Are there any conclusions that can feed back into quality enhancement in your institutional context, and are there ways in which students can be involved in this enhancement?
- Do you have any recommendations or advice to others to put forward on the issue of e-learning, based on your experience?

#### References

It is common practice in educational research projects to conduct a review of literature relevant to your topic. You are not being asked to do so on this occasion, as you are contributing to a larger body of research in which this aspect is already likely to be covered. However, if you have read anything that adds to the understanding of your project and want to include it, please do so and provide a bibliography after your conclusion, as is provided for citations made in this document.

#### **Methodology**

This section aims to provide information about ways of undertaking the research activity, and resources for those involved. The innovation/development projects aim to gain information about the empirical experience of respondents who are engaged in or involved in supporting a specific e-learning activity. We therefore recommend a case study approach as an appropriate means of conducting investigation into 'real-life' situations.

### *What is case study?*

Case study is a qualitative research method. Qualitative research adopts an interpretive approach, studying phenomena in their natural settings and attempting to make sense of them in terms of the meanings that they hold for those involved (Denzin, 1994). Case study offers one method for qualitative research, and involves an empirical inquiry which is conducted within set boundaries of location and time. It occurs as nearly as possible in natural contexts, explores significant features of the case and attempts to create plausible interpretations of findings (Bassey, 2003). In addition, evaluative case study involves conducting these inquiries to determine how worthwhile an activity is and to convey this to interested audiences.

The aim of the innovation/development research is to understand and assess the potential of e-learning as an aspect of educational experience within the art, design and media fields, and therefore it has a strong evaluative element. Evaluative case study research can be very tightly structured, for example in examining the extent to which a programme's stated objectives have been achieved. Alternatively, it may be broadly interpretive, or illuminative. The aims of illuminative evaluation are described as follows –

... to study the innovatory programme, how it operates; how it is influenced by the various ... situations in which it is applied; what those directly concerned regard as its advantages and disadvantages; and how students' intellectual tasks and academic experiences are most affected.

(Parlett and Hamilton, 1977, p. 10)

- the emphasis on innovatory activities suggests that this stance is appropriate to our current inquiry.

### *What kinds of outcomes can we expect from case study?*

It is expected that each case will be 'individual', so potentially diverse outcomes can be anticipated. There may be opportunities, however, to draw more general inferences from the body of findings that will be accumulated when all the case reports are available.

Generalization from case study findings is recognized to be difficult, and the issue has been the subject of debate for a long time (see Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995). There now appears to be an acceptance of the idea that individual case studies should be able to contribute to 'cumulative knowledge' or the development of 'theoretical insight' (Atkinson and Delamont, 1985). However, this depends on ensuring that best practice is adopted in research methodology, data collection, handling and analysis. At its best, reliable case study research can reveal understandings that are both unique and applicable to other situations.

This project aims to create an archive of findings from the diverse research initiatives that are being sponsored, enabling us to contribute findings and conclusions that will enter the public domain at a number of levels.

### **Methods of inquiry**

Research is a creative and flexible activity, but also one that repays systematic procedures.

There are a number of recognized stages in the process:

- Identification of an issue to investigate
- Drawing up of specific research questions and ethical guidelines to govern the research
- Deciding on which people, contexts, settings and situations are likely to be able to provide information.
- Drawing up a plan to gain this information and deciding the best methods of collecting it
- Collecting and storing data, establishing systematic ways of recording the information. Case study research, which is a qualitative method, often uses these ways of getting information on a topic –

Interviews - involving tape or video recording, note-taking, paraphrasing and making shortened reports of the tapes (full transcription is an option, but is very time consuming)

Observations – making field-notes that record aspects of a situation you are interested in; using audio or video recordings.

Questionnaires – If you are going in for this decide whether you are asking open-ended or closed (i.e. yes or no) questions; think about whether all the respondents you are involving will have the information to provide you with answers; try to read something on questionnaire design if this is unfamiliar to you; pilot it on ‘critical friends’

Research/project diary – this helps to keep you (and the project) on track. You can use it to keep contact details, everyday information about times/places of meetings etc. as well as speculations, impressions and ideas that might be important.

### **Ethics**

Ethical considerations are important in all research undertakings. The best guidelines to follow are those issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). However, most books on educational research have a chapter on ethics. Further guidelines can be issued for the project on request.

### **Data analysis**

One of the most frequently used strategies for analysing qualitative data of the type generated in case study research is ‘thematic analysis’. This involves sifting through the material that has been collected, looking out for correspondences or similarities across different parts of the data and placing ‘like with like’. You can do this electronically by ‘cutting and pasting’, or do it manually. Some researchers still like to see different piles of paper accumulating on the floor, others like to use coloured pens and so on. The idea is that you begin to assign your material to a number of categories that seem appropriate.

Once you have established some categories of data in this way, you can begin to think about naming them and are likely to recognize themes that stretch across different data items. It is likely that this process of generating descriptive categories or themes is the one that will be most useful to those working on this project. These themes will therefore act as a significant focus in your reporting of the project.

The method of reporting that is outlined above provides a good fit with case study method, and you should be able to include the findings and insights that you gain within the rubric suggested.

### **References**

- Atkinson, P. and Delamont, S. (1985), “Bread and dreams or bread and circuses? A critique of ‘case study’ research in education”, in Shipman, M. (ed.) *Educational Research, Principles, Policies and Practices*, London, Falmer.
- Bassey, M. (2003), *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*, London, Open University, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.
- McCormick, R. (1999), “Curriculum Development and the New Technology”, in Moon, B. and Murphy, P. (eds.) *Curriculum in Context*, London, Open University.
- Parlett, M. and Hamilton, D. (1977), “Evaluation as illumination: a new approach to the study of innovatory programmes”, in Hamilton, D. et al. (eds.), *Beyond the Numbers Game: A reader in Educational Evaluation*, Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Stake, R. E. (1995), *The Art of Case Study Research*, London, Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (1994), *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*, London, Sage (second edition).

### **Appendix 2: Distributed e-learning in Art, Design and Media Phase 3 research**

**Questions and protocols for focus group facilitation**

The **questioning route** in focus group research: easy beginning, then the sequence moves from general to specific. This is a 90-minute (one and a half hour) session.

Opening questions -get people talking and make them comfortable

**'Could you tell us who you are and about your favourite gadget?' (5 mins)**

Introductory questions - introduce the topic of discussion and get people to start thinking about their connection with the topic

**'What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the term 'e-learning'?' (10 mins)**

Transition questions – these ask participants to go into more depth about their experiences, making the connection between them and the topic of investigation.

**'What do you use computers for?' (10 mins)**

This is going to be a listing response. They get 3 minutes to list, then we can compare responses and finally we will ask them to say which is most important on their list and which is least important (provide stickers to put on their lists against most important, least important – we will put onto them a smiley face or scowly face).

Key questions (based on the central research questions) (45 mins)

Firstly, to describe current use: good and bad experiences

**'Think back to a good experience of using IT/computers for your work. Could you describe what happened for me?' (15 mins)**

**'Now think back to something you wanted to use computers for and it didn't work out, and tell me what happened.' (15 mins)**

Secondly, to evolve solutions to problems. We will provide them with a picture of a closed-up box, and ask them to address the following. They can draw or write on the paper and then tell us about what's in their box.

**'This magic box holds the answers to all your problems and difficulties with computing and IT. What's in the box?' (15 mins)**

(Should also have a spare question if they run out of steam – i.e. Futures – what can computing/IT do for you in 10 years time)

Ending questions: 3 types that work sequentially (**20 minutes for all 3**)

'All-things considered' question - asks each participant to determine their final position on critical areas of concern – e.g.

**'Of all the aspects of e-learning we discussed, which one is the most important to you?' (5 minutes)**

Summary question – moderator gives short oral summary of discussion that was evoked by the key questions, then asks

**'How well does that sum up what was said here?' (5 minutes)**

Final question – an insurance question (**give at least 10 minutes to this**)

**'Have we missed anything out? Is there anything we should have talked about and haven't?'**