

Learning & Teaching Conference 2010

Abstract 2A

“Am I Alone in Thinking.....?” Overcoming student concerns and isolation using a ‘Shared Thinking’ approach to FIMS Induction

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In 2009, FIMS induction provision was completely re-designed as part of work done on an inter-disciplinary PhD project between Education, Computing Science and Psychology. Away went a sequence of presentations with students as an audience. In came a new socially-oriented approach we named as Shared Thinking. This new approach, invented by a Kelvin Smith Scholarship student, involves a process of peer-interaction aimed at sharing initial concerns. The discussions are scaffolded by the use of voting technology familiar to many people when contestants on the TV show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" invoke the opportunity to "Ask the Audience." In the show, a question is put to the audience and their responses generate a shared display showing the number of votes for each option. The contestant then decides the option to choose as their answer. In Shared Thinking, a similar approach is used. The key difference is that the questions are co-constructed by the audience (the students) from reflective discussions. The display is also to serve the thinking of the 'audience' not just an individual. The variety of thinking, amongst the participants, is made visible as an act of whole-group communication. This display structures the response of mentors and tutors whilst allowing them to participate in the student-generated conversation. The Shared Thinking approach was modified by members of the project team in FIMS, to take account of 300 participants in a single session. Text messaging was introduced to accommodate large numbers of students who could then post small-group choices. These choices were sent directly to the shared display prior to voting. Voting then produces qualitative and quantitative data on the student experience. The display thereby simultaneously serves evaluation and development needs. Research findings will be presented including how Shared Thinking enhanced the perception, amongst participants, of the university as a high-quality provider. Students also reported being very much aware that they were not alone either in their thinking or in terms of the available support. More information on Shared Thinking is available at <http://www.sharedthinking.info>

Conference themes covered include:

- Induction and the first year experience
- How the use of technology can enhance the experience of students' experience of transitions.