

Domain: Learning and Instructional Technology / Lifelong Learning and Professional Development

Format: CIT Session

Equipment: Laptop, projector, screen and internet connection

Title: Supporting research and practice in relation to careers guidance and work-related learning

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Abstract

An interdisciplinary team of researchers, practitioners and professional associations in the UK have worked together to create a comprehensive website for those interested in career guidance research. This has been funded by the Department for Education and Skills in England. Target groups include: practitioners, policy makers, researchers, guidance students and trainees, tutors and trainers. The website is to support the development of a community of interest and has the potential to enhance practice. Its overall purpose is 'to bring together research and practice in guidance to increase effectiveness'.

A key feature of this website development is the construction of a shared knowledge base, by working with contextualised professional problems. This has been achieved by the formation of groups with relevant expertise. These groups represented a centre of expertise for particular topics and had several tasks (for example, the identification of gaps, key areas or problems and the provision of a mediated commentary on key documents and research findings on-line). Approximately 55 members of the guidance community contributed to the development of a shared knowledge base that has emerged from the contextualised problems faced in practice.

An important feature of the website is that it provides the opportunity to raise issues, engage in development work and contribute to on-line discussions. This type of collaboration is necessary for active knowledge creation. In this way, it is hoped that we can progress our understanding of guidance issues - as existing available knowledge is combined with new insights to create new forms of contextualised knowledge.

The development of a complementary website has focused upon supporting research in work-related learning and is an example of a collaborative initiative supported by the Presidents of EARLI and EERA. As such this initiative is likely to be of interest to those from the learning and professional development SIG.

Extended Summary

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Aims:

The aims were to:

- develop an imaginative way of linking processes of knowledge acquisition, development, transformation and creation with approaches to tackling the core problems of guidance practice;
- examine the ways in which learning to practise guidance are created and shared (beliefs, concepts, ideas, theories, actions) in the search for new understandings of effective guidance;

Methodology / research design:

A key feature of the development has been the construction of a shared knowledge base (website) from the contextualised problems that policy makers, managers, practitioners, researchers and trainers face. This has involved expert groups focusing on particular topics and key issues and providing a mediated commentary on key documents and research findings on-line. This has enriched the process and acted to validate the outcomes. The website has two main sections:

- **LMI Future Trends** – consisting of labour market information focusing on labour market changes and skills needs in the UK.
- **Making Guidance more effective** - containing a range of synopses, links, resources and edited discussions on six inter-related themes: Equal Opportunities; Impact Analysis; Using Research in Practice; Improving Practice; Lifelong Learning; International Perspectives.

The website extends the use of ICT to support the knowledge development of the dispersed community of guidance practice (Brown *et al.*, 2002). The work of the six expert work groups meant it was possible to advance understanding through processes of knowledge combination, where existing knowledge was combined with new insights to create new forms of contextualised knowledge. New participants could then make use of online support from a community of interest that focused on the interweaving of guidance research and practice. Participants can make contributions in different forms (e.g. text, images, links to documents, html pages or other notes) and can comment on material and contribute to discussions, and in so doing elaborate the knowledge that is already in the website.

Brown *et al.* (2002) stressed the importance of having time and space for face to face interactions to facilitate socialisation, externalisation (or active reflection), combination of new and existing knowledge, and the internalisation

of different types of knowledge (Nonaka & Konno, 1998). Opportunities to meet and talk through issues, engage in development work and link to continuing on-line discussions that facilitated the collaboration necessary for active knowledge creation were therefore built into the development process.

Outcomes:

The website, launched in September 2004, has been extensively used and the feedback from the target community has been very favourable. The created knowledge represents a social product, but the process of collaborative knowledge creation also comprises a form of knowledge building where individuals (learn to) share their knowledge and create new knowledge together. Consequently, a platform, grounded in the realities of guidance practice has emerged, which has enabled us to build continuing relationships with members of the community, especially those engaged in research, training or continuous professional development. The environment enables participants to: (jointly) develop, edit and modify materials; share annotation on material; facilitate the sharing of experience; and promote discussion, sharing and active collaboration.

It does this by: offering virtual (and in some cases real) spaces for debate and collaboration; supporting action research; offering active support and moderation; offering support to particular interest groups; and providing a forum for discussion of attempts to tackle complex problems in careers guidance practice. The website can be accessed at <http://www.guidance-research.org>

Theoretical and educational significance

By working together, participants used the collective and individual knowledge of group members, co-constructing plans of action to extend that knowledge (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1994). In order to work together online and become used to sharing knowledge, deepen their own and common understanding and creating further insights, it is crucial for participants to be able to coordinate, clarify and regulate the discourse themselves (de Laat *et al.* 2001). We therefore adapted a model of progressive inquiry (Hakkarainen and Muukonen, 1999) that engaged participants in the development in a process of question and explanation driven inquiry. These 'team tasks' comprised a series of particular questions, grounded in practice, relating to one of the six broad themes, and helped to scaffold the learning activities of participants, together with face-to-face sessions that provided still greater support to the process of knowledge building related to the interleaving of research and practice. The interactive features on the website are being extended to allow group and individual web logs.

This initiative has supported the creation of a dynamic community of interest bringing guidance research and practice closer together. It has enabled us to examine the ways in which learning about guidance is created and shared as well as providing a powerful engine to assist with the search for new understandings of effective guidance.

The complementary website under development on supporting research in work-related learning and is an example of a collaborative initiative supported by the Presidents of EARLI and EERA. As such we would welcome the involvement of EARLI members, particularly those interested in learning and professional development.

References

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