



The Open
University

Developing staff in effective online tutoring

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Open University in Scotland
SEDA spring conference 2011



Photo: Richard Learoyd



What are the key challenges in creating online courses for staff?

- Engagement
- Context
- Working practices



Open University context

- Biggest university in the UK, world leader in flexible distance learning
- About 8000 part-time tutors, working from home, based all over UK, Ireland and mainland Europe
- About 5000 academic, academic-related and support staff working in main centre in Milton Keynes, 10 English regional centres, 3 national centres (Scotland, N Ireland, Wales)
- **Large, highly distributed workforce**



Photo: Andy Hendry



Supported open learning

- Distance learning: distance teaching
- High quality teaching materials, using latest technology as well as traditional texts
- Local support from regional or national centre
- Personal tutor as part of a group of 15 – 25
- Tutor runs tutorials, marks assignments, answers queries
- **Institutional drive to online learning and support using virtual learning environment (based on moodle)**

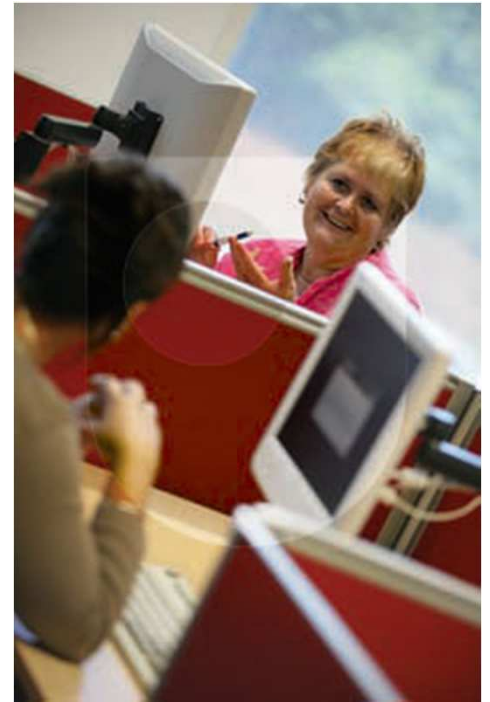


Photo: Andy Hendry



Online staff development

- My role is to train staff in use of online tools
- Awareness for those writing course materials
- Online facilitation for those using the tools

How do we make the training engaging and attractive so that staff persevere?



Effective staff development

- Much of the learning in a staff development event is informal and takes place in the spaces around the formal event (Eraut, 2004)
- Learning activities should be embedded in actual working practices, and should take account of peer-learning (Boud, 1999)
- Staff development works when the learning is experiential (Stefani & Elton, 2002)

Eraut, M., (2004) Informal learning in the workplace. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(2) 247-273

Boud, D. (1999) Situating academic development in professional work: using peer learning. *International Journal of Academic Development*, 4(1), 3-10

Stefani, L & Elton, L (2002) Continuing professional development of academic teachers through self-initiated learning, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27(2), 117 - 129



Tutor Moderators module

- Introduction to online tutoring using online forums, synchronous online software (Elluminate), wikis
- Strong pastoral support – the ‘identifiable individual’
- Mainly for tutors who are using the tools
- More than 3000 course participants since 2004
- 76% completion rate

Tutor Moderators design



- Short and fully online (~ 5 hours a week for 3 weeks)
- Learning contract
- Experiential learning: online activities
- Some activities give ‘experience of being a student online’
- Community of practice – groups of peers with similar interests
- Near-synchronous peer-moderated online forums & synchronous online sessions
- Must do 3 out of 5 activities each Week to complete
- Personalised activity checklist & certificate of completion
- Two week catch-up period at end
- Open access material (within OU)





Tutor Moderators home page

TUTOR-MODS-V2 Tutor Moderators v2

Welcome

"Tutor Moderators" offers an introduction to supporting students using online forums and Elluminate. You will explore approaches to working online and will practise using moderator tools.


Resources

-  Course resources
-  Tutor Moderators wiki

Forums





-  Helping Hand forum
(Unread posts)
-  Last minute spaces
(Unread posts)

Calendars



-  Personal calendar

Introduction







Tutor Moderators is a three week course which develops your ability to support your student group online using forums and Elluminate, as part of a blended tuition strategy. The course is written primarily for ALs but will also be of interest to those who work with ALs. It explores online pedagogy: which includes a consideration of when you would use these online tools and why.

-  Course aims
-  How to study this course
-  Using this website
-  Earning your Certificate of Course Completion

Week 1

-  Week 1 – Tutoring in a forum
-  Reflection 1 forum (Unread posts)

Week 2

-  Week 2 – Tutoring with Elluminate
-  Reflection 2 forum (Unread posts)
-  Bookings wiki
-  Elluminate demonstration room
-  Elluminate practice room
-  Elluminate recorded session

Week 3

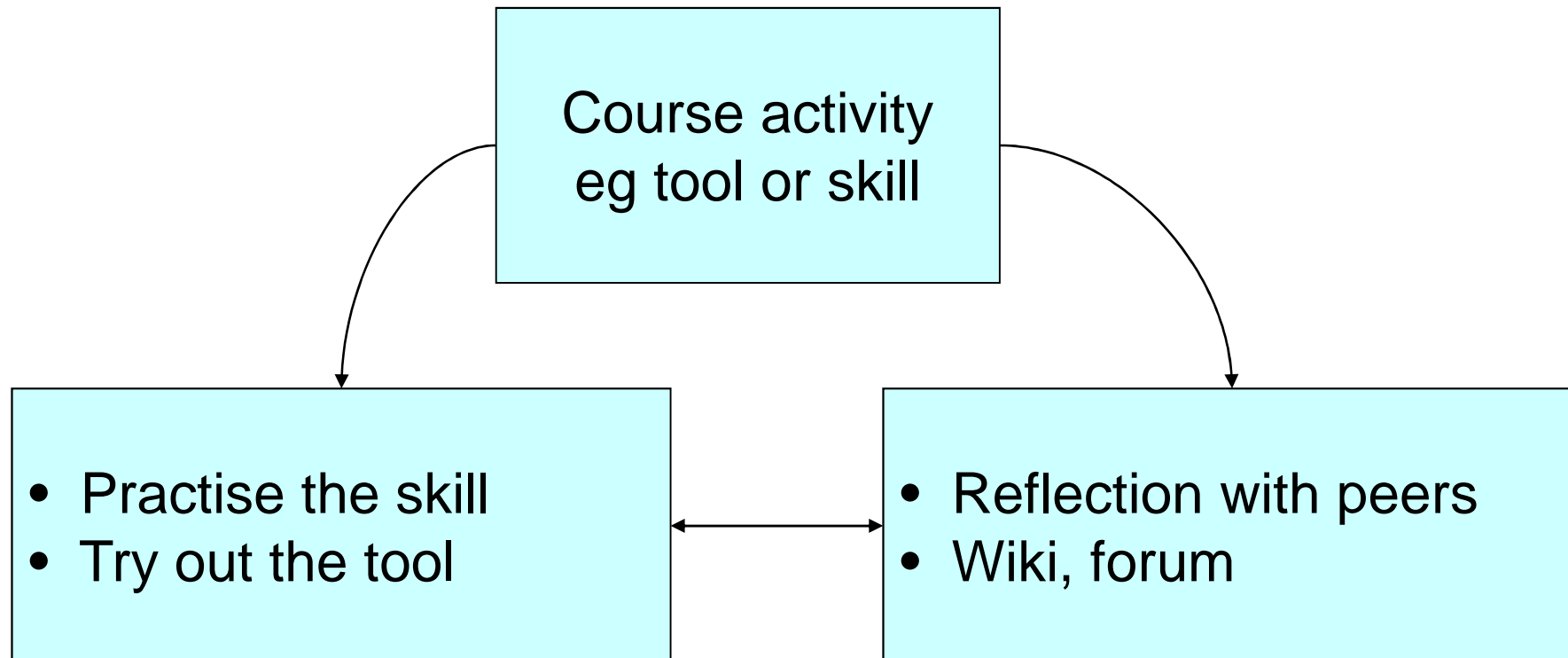
-  Week 3 – Facilitating online groups
-  Reflection 3 forum (Unread posts)

What other participants have said

"Clear time in your diary and participate fully - it is really worth it."
"Enjoy it - really good fun and very useful. You will get out of it what you put in, so embrace it!"
"If you're busy, remember you don't have to do everything."
"The course is definitely a great help, as well as lots of fun. Don't hesitate :-)"
"Try to keep in touch as frequently as possible however briefly."
"The three weeks go by quickly - which is an insight in itself! - so you have to make a point of finding time for it. Reply when you read, don't wait to come back to it later!"



Experiential learning in Tutor Moderators



Activity checklist



First name: Anne Surname: Campbell OUCU: amc348 Date: 14.10.10
Unit: Anne



Week 1 Activities	Section	Complete
A. Post an introductory message	1.2	✓
B. Discussion topics	1.6	✓
C. Summarise an online debate	1.7	✓
D. Discuss what helped you feel at ease	1.9	✓
E. Uses for your tutor group forum	1.10	✓

Week 2 Activities	Section	Complete
A. Elluminate demonstration	2.5	✓
B. Challenges and potential	2.6	✓
C. Try Elluminate for yourself	2.8	✓
D. Devise an activity	2.9	✓
E. Uses for Elluminate	2.10	✓

Week 3 Activities	Section	Complete
A. Communicating online	3.2	✓
B. Approaches to effective communication	3.7	✓
C. Dealing with disruption	3.8	✓
D. Reflecting on participation	3.10	✓
E. A strategy for a successful online group	3.13	✓



Module certificate

<i>Tutor Moderators Course V2</i>		The Open University
<i>This is to certify that</i>		
<i>Anne Campbell</i>		
<i>successfully completed this Course, and has participated in activities on:</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ <i>Tutoring with forums</i>➤ <i>Tutoring with Elluminate</i>➤ <i>Facilitating online groups</i>		
		
<i>Signed</i>	<i>Date: 14-10-2010</i>	



Typical activities

9 Feeling at ease

You will no doubt have realised from this week's introductions that getting to know fellow students or staff in an online environment is just as important as it is when you are working face to face, if not more so. This is the first, and in many ways the most vital task in effective tutor group moderation.

Activity 1D Discuss what helped you to feel at ease this week

- Visit the Reflection 1 forum and select a message or phrase which really helped to make you feel at ease with the other members of the group.
- What lessons have you learnt for your own future practice as a moderator? Post your thoughts in the "Feeling at ease" discussion topic.

Next: [10 Uses for your tutor group forum ►](#)

7 Your approaches to effective communication

We hope you can see that the use of online tools requires new perspectives on effective communication with the group. We have discussed the influences of social presence, affordance of the tool, developing community, writing and literacy practices. Now it is time to consider your own approaches.

Activity 3B Approaches to effective communication

- What are the two most important lessons for you here which you could adopt with your group to ensure effective communication?
- Leave a message in the "Approaches to effective communication" discussion topic in the Week 3 Reflection forum.

Next: [8 Dealing with disruption ►](#)



Recent forum topics outside formal course material

- How to manage very large forums
- What to do when students discuss or reveal mental health issues in a national online forum
- How the meaning of 'moderator' changes with context
- Sharing technical knowledge



Exit evaluations

- Anonymous exit questionnaire link given to all module completers
- 1102 returns (73%) between Jun 2008 & April 2011
- Quantitative data – confidence, competence
- Qualitative data
 - “How has the course helped you as a moderator?”
 - “How might we improve the course?”
- Common themes in responses

Quantitative evaluation - confidence

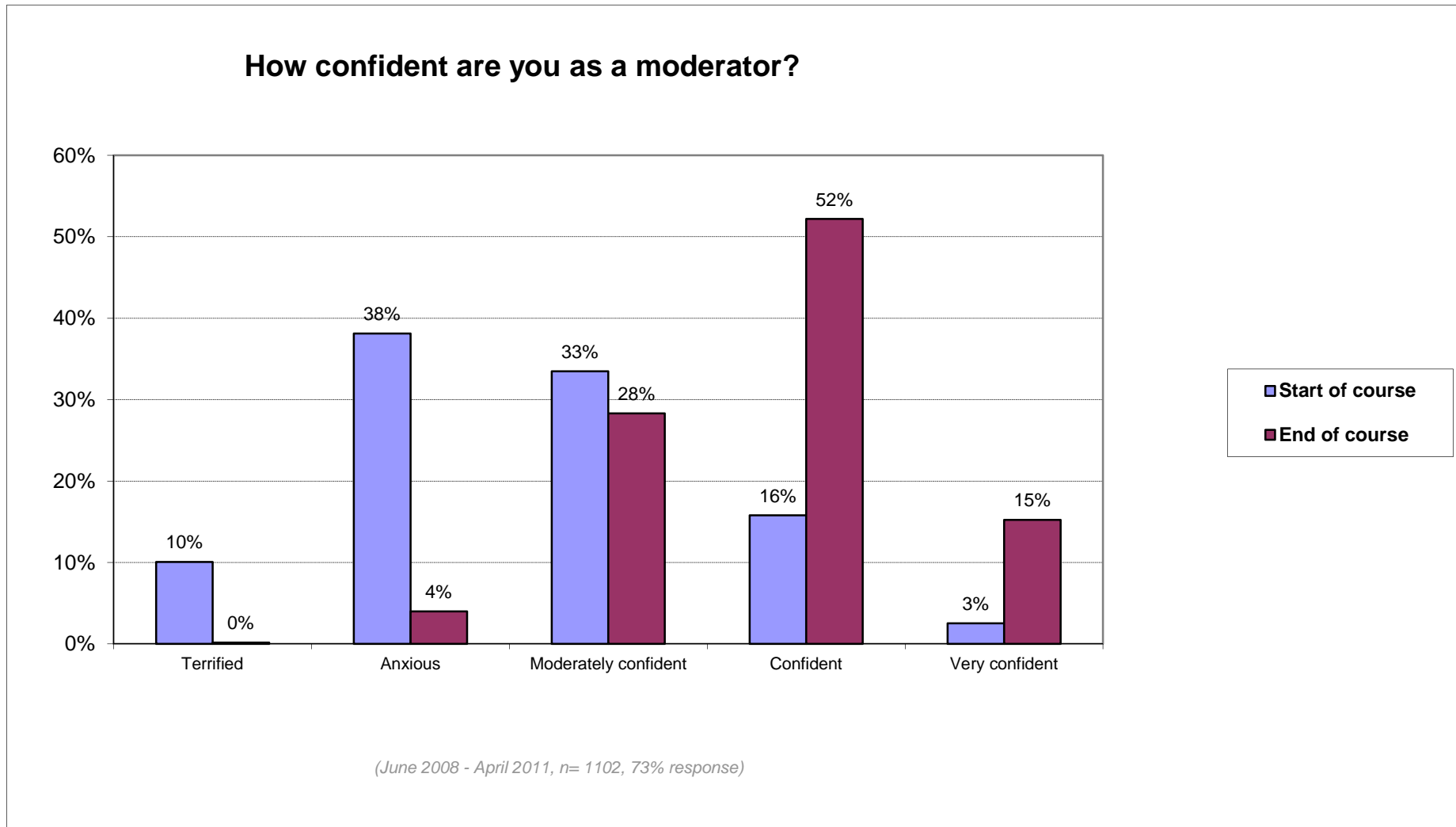


Fig 1 Perceptions of confidence before and after the course

Quantitative evaluation - competence

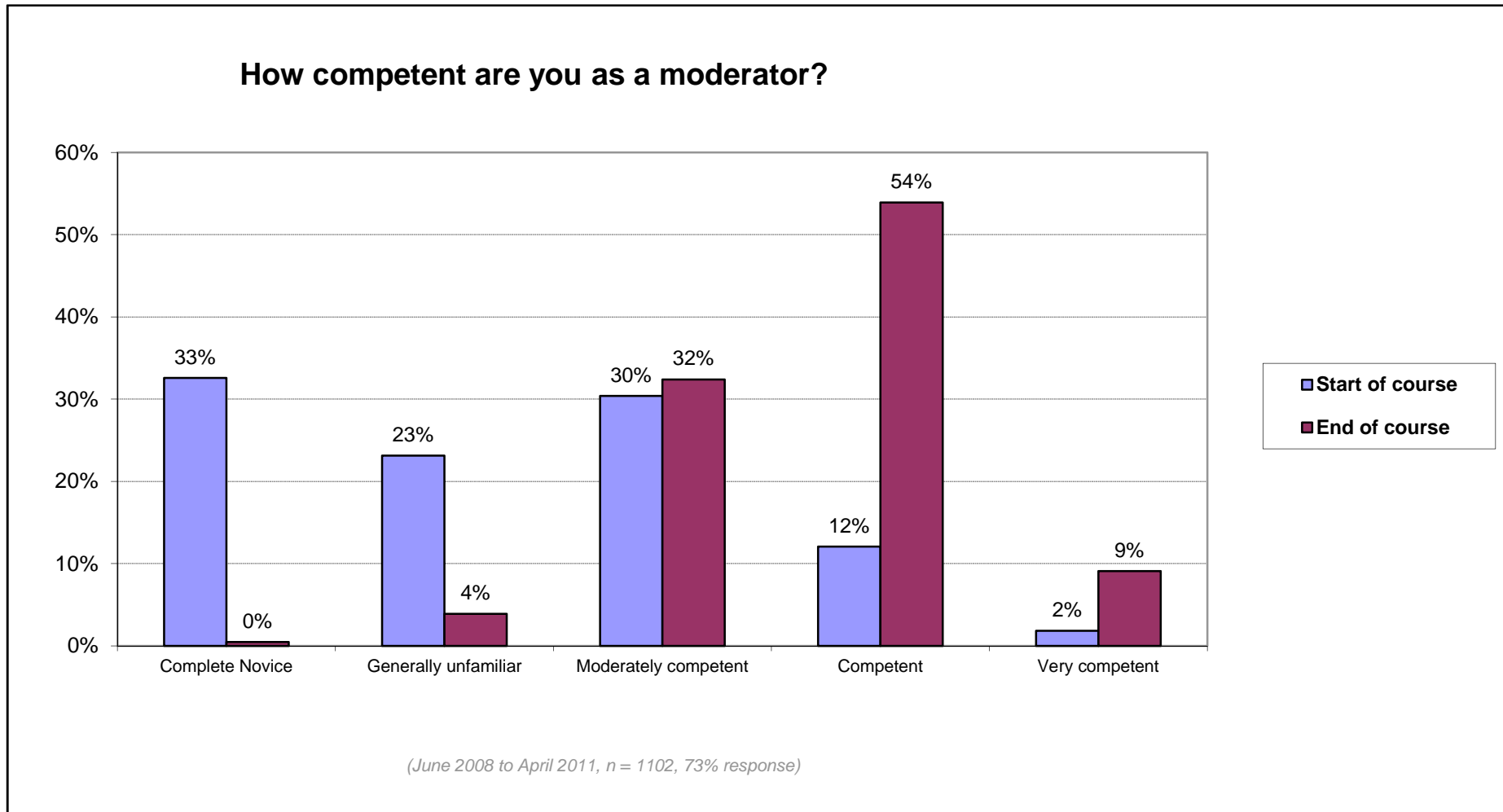


Fig 2 Perceptions of competence before and after the course

- Clear increase in confidence and competence in moderating role



Participant thoughts - themes

- *“The most important learning came from being a participant.”*
- *“There's nothing like learning by doing. This was my first experience of an online forum so doing it was great.”*
- *“Genuinely caused me to reflect on what I do and how I can improve my effectiveness.”*
- *“ I have benefited from the wealth of experience volunteered by colleagues.”*



Summary

- Experiential learning is effective in giving staff confidence and competence in online facilitation
 - Experience of ‘feeling like a new student’
 - Experience of trying out tools
- Reflection with a community of peers plays a central role in building confidence and inspiring new ideas
- Creating spaces for informal discussion online can partly recreate the ‘chat in the corridor’
- Open access materials, including open wiki, allows staff to revisit learning or complete activities



Design an activity

- Choose one context from your group
- Design a short online staff development activity – make it experiential & reflective
- Make a list of strategies to encourage staff engagement in online development



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