TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Herewith to testify that the papers accepted for the 7th Annual Conference on World Wide Web Applications, 29-31 August 2005, Cape Town have been peer-reviewed by independent and external peer-reviewers.

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Comm. Skills Online three years down the line: reflecting on design principles in blended learning

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Abstract

Comm. Skills Online, which involved integrated project work based around an Internet search, was piloted for three years at DIT with groups of Communication students, resulting in a marked improvement in students' computer literacy, academic literacy and hard print literacy. This paper reflects on a design principle, derived from research into communication in written mode, which revealed that five essential communicative functions are required for effective communication to take place, namely the contextual, ideational, interactive, social and reflexive functions. These functions were found to be integral to the construction of knowledge in academic writing, which suggested that they might constitute an educational design principle, as follows. Firstly, learning in mixed-mode must be contextualised so that offline and online activities are blended into a coherent experience for students. Next, the issue of course content and materials needs to be addressed: the Internet is an information-rich, easily accessed data source, but its potential to facilitate intellectual development needs to be harnessed. Thirdly, the nature of the learning interactions and how they will combine to promote effective learning needs to be thought through carefully in advance in blended learning. Social considerations include local academic requirements, but also a recognition of the social inequalities which have resulted in wide variations in student preparedness for online learning. Finally, the reflexive aspect regulates the learning process, and opportunities for peer and self reflection, as well as student and course assessment, need to be built into the course.

Keywords: instructional design, web-based learning, blended learning, academic literacy, integrated projects, problem-based learning.

1. Introduction

The Comm. Skills Online project was piloted with groups of Communication students at DIT with over 1,000 students from 2003-2005, and involved integrated project work in mixed-mode delivery based around an Internet search for Professionally Relevant Internet Sites (the PRINTS project). The project involved putting integrated scenario work partly online, based around a professionally-related web quest. It was conceived late in 2002, after my Pioneers induction into web-based learning (Pete et al, 2002), as a tentative solution for developing not only English literacy but also academic and computer literacy for our first year/semester students. Birthed in the throes of the Technikon Natal/ML Sultan Technikon merger, Comm. Skills Online catapulted the Department of English and Communication and its 6,000 students into the future, and gained us international exposure as a language department on the cutting edge of the digital divide. Tried and tested small-group communication methods were blended with electronic media, in keeping with DIT’s new status as a University of Technology. The quality of the students’
oral presentations and written reports was markedly better in the Comm. Skills Online project than with offline project work, suggesting that the web-based learning project (or “WeLP”) offers students not only more efficient information technology but quality enhancements to language learning. In previous accounts I have attempted to show how (and why) integrated project work is particularly successful when translated into mixed mode. In this account I would like to explore one more layer of explanation which has remained implicit until now: the fact that the course is underpinned by a principle of course design based on fundamental communicative functions.

2. The design principle used in this account

The suggested design principle is taken from ongoing research into written composition, in which a theoretical model of communicative functions was formulated to provide the rationale for a practical model of composing. In the course of the research, the five essential communicative functions, that is functions ‘without which’ the process of communication cannot occur, were found to be the contextual, ideational, interactive, social and reflexive functions. These can be explained briefly as follows. For effective communication to occur, it needs to be set in some kind of context, and some form of ideational content needs to be generated, which is done by means of an interaction. All human communication has a social loading, and is regulated by reflexive elements in the nature of a feedback loop. Knowledge is constructed in learning interactions, and could be viewed as a more specific and rule-governed type of meaning-making: thus the essential functions involved in meaning-making could be seen to be relevant for knowledge construction. I have consciously addressed the issue of how these communicative functions are realised in course design in my own courses since 2000, when, by a process resembling reverse engineering (de Catellay 2002:107-108) these functions were identified as underpinning a practical model of composing. The introduction of hypermedia into the usual traditional mix led to a re-assessment of what could be achieved in course design. At that stage the five functions were known, but were referred to as “aspects” of communication; that they were in fact a system of communicative functions underpinning writing (or what Franck terms a “theoretical model”, 2002:99-100) became clear only after a rigorous theoretical modelling process was applied to the phenomenon of written composition (note that Halliday identifies similar functions performed by language, see Halliday and Hasan, 1989:44-49; Kern and Warschauer, 2000:5).

When used as a template for the analysis of effective course design, the communicative functions could be interpreted as follows:

- **Contextual:** This function relates to the social context in which knowledge is constructed, and requires the course designer to decide how learning is to be contextualised.
- **Ideational:** This function relates to the source of the knowledge to be constructed, or the process whereby knowledge actually comes into being, and raises the question of what course content/materials are to be provided, and how.
- **Interactive:** As knowledge is constructed in learning interactions (including interactions with course materials and other resources), the course designer needs to anticipate how participants will interact in constructing knowledge.
- **Social:** The social parameters, conventions or constraints operating in a given learning situation need to be identified and made explicit to learners, particularly in respect of local assessment criteria.
• Reflexive: This relates to how participants will reflect on and assess their performance in constructing knowledge, and includes the issue of formal assessment and how it will be carried out, as well as course assessment.

### 2.2 The descriptive nature of the design principle

In an earlier paper (2005) I have suggested that the ways in which the above functions are fulfilled in an actual course is a significant factor in course design, particularly in higher degree courses, where students will be actively involved in constructing knowledge (see Clarke, 2002; Conceicao-Runlee and Daley, 1998; Jonassen, 1999). But the system of functions could also be considered significant as a course design principle for undergraduate courses, particularly in first year, where students need to be introduced to basic research processes. The functions have already been pre-empted to some extent in the literature (see, for example, Jonassen's terms “active”, “constructive”, “collaborative”, “contextual” and “reflective”, n.d.) but have not previously been identified as the functions necessary for knowledge construction. When used as template for course design, the system of functions does not impose value judgements as to how knowledge should be constructed, as implied by Mason's (1998) three models of online courses, or the critical elements described by different writers in Herrington et al (2001) but rather focuses on how effectively knowledge will be constructed in a course. The design template is descriptive rather than prescriptive, which means that it can be used within any educational paradigm: it is therefore tentatively suggested as providing a generalizable principle of course design. This is not to claim that the system of functions - or the investigation which led to its discovery - is value-free, merely that the value has been to attempt to transcend, as far as possible, socially-constructed views of communication and to arrive at the dynamic systems underpinning the process as well as the social mechanisms which drive them (Bhaskar 1978). In this account the above functions will be used as a framework to point to specific features of course design within the five functions which are thought to have contributed to the success of the Comm. Skills Online project.

### 3. Contextual aspects of course design

#### 3.1 How infrastructural and instructional elements are interlinked

Contextual aspects could be further divided into the infrastructural and the instructional, although both are obviously interlinked: one cannot deal with instructional design independently of infrastructural concerns, particularly in a delivery mode where regular access to computers and the Internet is essential, and where most students do not have personal access to either computers or the Internet. When the course is planned in the context of an institution which is virtually dysfunctional because of a merger, supplying the technical infrastructure for disadvantaged (mostly ESL) students becomes critical. Our department lectures over 6,000 students in English (which is really Business Communication) and has eleven full-time staff members. There are open-access student labs at the campus where our Engineering students are based: one 50-seater of antique workstations, which take over 20 minutes to switch on (and then about 80% actually function - that is, on a “good” day) and two 40-seaters, one with new Pentium 4s, which are currently being replaced with updated models, and the other with slightly older models and slower access. This year three more student labs were supplied at the Steve Biko Campus, but with no Internet access, which means that the computers function mainly as advanced typewriters. I must mention at this point that English Departments are traditionally the worst technically equipped departments of any institution, and are regularly viewed by Management and Technical Staff alike as not needing computers, or computer
laboratories, software or data projectors, as all we need, allegedly, is “talk” (and chalk, if you are lucky enough to be allocated a room with a chalkboard). At the beginning of the project we would regularly find that our lab bookings had been swapped to give us the room with the oldest machines and the slowest Internet access. However, we have forged an excellent relationship with the Steve Biko Lab staff, as they have accepted that we are the “Comm. Skills Online experts”, and know that we can be trusted to keep the labs tidy and functional. Management are happy that we dared “to boldly go” (without splitting the infinitive, however) where few English departments have ventured before, that is into virtual space, because it has boosted the Department’s research output. While it has always been stressed that the Comm. Skills Online project is a curriculum development initiative and not a research project, in two years it had generated enough materials for six international conferences, two of these overseas conferences, one of which resulted in a book chapter publication (Pratt, in press). It also generated an electronic poster presentation, delivered by first- and second-year Child and Youth Development students, at the 9th SAAMFT International Conference.

3.2 How infrastructural constraints were overcome

The lack of technical infrastructure was overcome in our case mainly because the English staff involved in the project were highly committed to making it work, because of the support of the Online Learning Centre staff, who loaned us their staff induction lab during various crises, and because it was accepted that Comm. Skills Online was a pilot project, and could not involve all students. For the latter reason, and for ethical concerns, the project could only be carried out with small diploma groups (maximum 80 students), mostly semester Engineering groups, with the better Steve Biko labs being booked as soon as the Department’s timetable was competed. This would not have been possible had our official timetabler, Linda Herbert, not been an IT specialist and a keen Comm. Skills Online practitioner, and had our HOD, Carol de Kock, not been committed to making the project a success (Carol is online herself this year, staffing on the Comm. Skills for Town Planning course and taking part in the Virtual Space Cadets staff induction course). The majority of our 6,000 students cannot be included in the project as yet. They do, however, have access to ditcom, our Departmental website, which was set up on WebCT as a resource base and communication network, and is about to be updated with a MCQ database of over 200 questions for self-tests and revision (our standardised Control Tests are currently multiple choice, for obvious logistical reasons). While constraints in the technical infrastructure have meant that we could run only pilot studies online, it was understood that improvements and enhancements in course design, learning methods and resources would be fed back into the mainstream English courses: this point will be picked up later, as it became a key infrastructural issue in maintaining the impetus of Comm. Skills Online.

3.3 The impact of infrastructural elements on course design

To move to the most problematic of the associated instructional contextual issues: how does one design a mixed-mode course where one is not sure (1) which student groups and (2) which lecturers will be taking it? (Though obviously only lecturers with web-based learning experience can run the lab sessions.) This puts stress on the instructional aspect of contextualising learning effectively for students. One solution is to have a generic Comm. Skills Online course which is appropriate to all diploma groups. The course design problem then becomes: how can one do this and still set learning in a professionally relevant context for students in over forty different diploma groups? Again, a solution is that the course designer bases the course on a generic web quest where students search for and report back on professionally relevant sites, that is, the PRINTS project, which is
the core of *Comm. Skills Online* course. So that all students in a diploma group do not choose the same sites, generic themes must be suggested which are relevant to all careers, such as employment, sites of academic interest, professional websites, sites with tutorials or online lessons, and sites describing specialist artefacts and/or processes. In spite of the fact that we have used the PRINTS project for three years (five semesters with Engineering students), I still find student responses to the project fascinating and innovative, and assessing their orals and written reports is much more interesting than assessing offline student projects, particularly when we can manage to post the reports online in the WebCT presentation area. It must be stressed that creating generic web-based learning projects does not happen overnight: outcome-based offline projects had been piloted since 2000, using professionally-relevant generic scenarios, mostly based around funding motivations for career-specific projects. These pilot projects suggested that contextualising learning in professional scenarios was a key success factor in improving academic performance.

### 3.4 How the pilot studies fed into mainstream instruction

One further contextual issue needs to be mentioned. I said above that it was understood that improvements and enhancements in course design, learning methods and resources would be fed back into the mainstream English courses. This was not merely lip service: we were desperately looking for innovative ways to deal creatively with our huge student intake for the English course and our steadily diminishing staff complement. It must also be remembered that the pilot studies put stress on the whole system in terms of making the timetabling more complex. The breakthrough happened at the end of 2003, when I was unanimously appointed to formulate the Department’s policy for the move to continuous assessment. This necessitated complete re-curricululation, and involved formulating and implementing the testing policy for both annual first-year and first semester groups. As the outcomes used in the *Comm. Skills Online* courses had already been piloted successfully with selected offline groups since 2000, I made these the basis for the annual and semester mainstream curriculum, which meant that *Comm. Skills Online* had not only fed innovations into mainstream courses, it had now become the mainstream. This meant that we could now set the regular Control Tests for students involved in online learning, rather than having special project-related tests for this group. Moreover, the huge increase in student numbers after the merger, combined with a demonstration of creative use of the WebCT Quiz tool for tests in Electronics by Ernst Fedderke, had led me to set some of our Control Tests with multiple choice questions in 2003. After the re-curriculum and introduction of the new continuous assessment policy in 2004, all annual and semester Control Tests were set with MCQs, and now most of these are marked electronically and statistically analysed, thanks to the advent of Professor Graham Stewart in the Department, and his advanced expertise in databases and successful liaison with Computer Services in the matter of electronic marking. Rather than working passively within the landscape of our given educational context, we have used *Comm. Skills Online* to transform that context and reduce - considerably - the drudgery associated with language teaching.

### 4. Ideational aspects of course design

In *Comm. Skills Online* the content of learning is provided mainly by the learners themselves within the scenario “frame”. *Comm. Skills Online* produces better student work because, from the start, it is clear that students are the specialists in their particular area of professional expertise. Project staff can help students with computer literacy and key words in web searches, but not with subject-specific data, which students have to find,
process, evaluate and synthesise with other data in written and oral report back in collaboration with their own team members, although the lecturer also offers moral and practical support. Not only do students find specialist information which is not known to English staff (thereby creating a real communication gap), but they sometimes find cutting edge innovations on the Web which even their diploma staff do not know about. One of my Analytical Chemistry students recently discovered online a new computer protocol for testing materials, which she said she would mention on her CV, as she thought it would improve her employment prospects. Many students have commented in their oral report back that the Internet search has given them a much better idea of what their prospective working career in their chosen field of study will entail. There is very little actual plagiarism of webpage texts, as the project criteria require the students to work with the information they find: we have found the mere act of rephrasing information for a wider audience (and not only the lecturer) can make students internalise it. For example, my Town and Regional Planning students are reporting back on scholarly articles, and they have to say not only what the article deals with, but who wrote it, in what context, and how suitable it is for their own academic purposes. It must be stressed that, even though students are supplying most of the ideational content of the course, there is a need for clear guidance in the form of both hard copy notes and online materials (online materials are duplicated offline, and vice versa). We have found that the more knowledge content the students themselves must supply, the more structured the actual course plan must be, with clear guidance as to academic requirements and assessment criteria. The fact that many of the reports are posted online on the WebCT presentation area provides good student models and spurs students on to perform better: it becomes a matter of team spirit to put on a good show in both the written report (for a group mark) and the oral presentation (for an individual mark, but presented in teams), which we have found leads to good attendance and above average performance. In their course feedback students have consistently rated Comm. Skills Online high for the guidance which is provided (see Table 2). It must be remembered that instructions, assignment rubrics and examples are also a kind of course content, and it is essential that students are well-provided for in this respect. Use of an administrative shell program such as WebCT makes it very easy to post additional materials and resources online at short notice with no duplication cost.

Figure 1: A typical Comm. Skills Online team page, kindly volunteered by team “Alchemist”
5. Interactive aspects of course design

5.1 The importance of live group interaction in blended learning

Apart from the usual interactions between teacher/student, student/student and student/offline resources, in mixed-mode there are also interactions between student/computer, student/Internet contacts, and student/electronic resources to consider. While in previous accounts I have emphasised the role of the Internet and electronic communication in expanding the student’s world view and enhancing academic - and hard print - literacy, it is, ironically, traditional large group teaching and the small group interactions where team decisions are made which make or break integrated project work, whether online or offline. Once the students are all working in the lab, absorbed in their projects, it is tempting to allow student/computer (or Internet) interactions to take over, particularly for chronically overworked English lecturers. However, plenary group sessions where the lecturer pulls things together are vitally important, particularly in giving guidance for the standardised Control Tests, which cannot now be completely integrated into the project work, and actually require some top-down teaching, mainly to stress what will be unfamiliar academic requirements to first year/semester students, no matter how comprehensive their Study Guides. For mixed-mode delivery to work, small-group sessions must be scheduled in rooms without computers, and students need regular opportunities to talk to each other in their teams, and also to document their decisions in hard print copies (e.g. minutes, reports). Teams must be randomly selected so that groups are not polarised into mono-cultural groups or groups of like academic ability. If students are allowed to choose their own teams, not only does this tend to happen, but prior affiliations wreak havoc with group bonding. Group work also needs to be facilitated very carefully so that team spirit develops. While team pages are a good device for group bonding, we do not expect teams to create their own team web pages, as eleven weeks is hardly enough time for the actual course, let alone to teach students how to create webs, and most students do not have their own computers, digital cameras or scanners. Recently I have found that if I take digital photos of each team, set these in a web page template, and let the students choose the colours, font and other design features, team spirit is greatly enhanced, particularly when the resulting team page is displayed online. I have also found that digital photos of the current batch of students used as background to the course materials help to emphasise to students the relative ease with which web pages can be customised to suit the local context, and make them feel that a part of the Internet is their own territory.

5.2 The synergy which develops between student and computer

While the human interactive element is stressed here, one thing I have noted recently in the Comm. Skills Online project is how students appear to develop a bond with their computers. Initially one sees an inexperienced user nervously fumbling with an unfamiliar machine, but eventually a gestalt forms, where machine and user appear to become fused into a harmonious whole, a key learning synergy which does not appear to have been studied except in terms of the small-motor-skills development needed for expert computer use. We have also noted that interactions with computers and the Internet teach students precision: a computer will not obey an inaccurately-phrased request, nor will the correct website appear if the exact address is not typed in. Students whose given names seem to change daily as the inclination strikes them have also come to grief on the computer answer cards used in our Control Tests (“no name brands” has become the staff byword
for this phenomenon). Students do not achieve precision merely from conventional IT-type instruction on computers, which they find boring: they achieve precision by having intrinsic motivation to get it right, particularly if the incentive is to access information which will enhance performance in their specialist academic subjects or eventual professional functioning.

Figure 2: Use of student digital photo shots as the background to online course materials

6. Social aspects of course design

One of the success factors in the Comm. Skills Online project is the strong focus on the student’s eventual professional functioning, which is rarely achieved in conventional English courses, primarily because English staff know comparatively little about a wide variety of specialist technical professions. The project sets language learning in a social context which has intrinsic motivation for students and makes clear the connection between communication skills and their eventual careers. It also harnesses to the ends of language learning the very talents and aptitudes which have made students chose a vocational course. Another social success factor is that local academic criteria are made explicit right from the beginning of the course, with examples of student work provided to act as models and guides. A group standard of encouraging team members to help each other is also set at the outset. Because preparedness for online learning is so varied in our student groups, we use the strategy of having at least one student who has had some experience in Internet browsing in each team. After calling for volunteers of this kind, each volunteer is asked to select four names out of a hat, thus ensuring that team selection is random. Students add their own unique social flavour to the mix via discussion forums and wacky team names. Some teams gain social status by designing and uploading their own web pages for their team page: social pressure to impress one’s peers works better than marks as an incentive to excel. “Netiquette” on the whole has not been a problem, with remarkably few students slipping up socially on the Discussion forum, although we did
have one case of a young man embarrassing a young lady in his class by propositioning her in the chat room. We try not to clamp down openly on salacious materials appearing on desktops, obviously discouraging these, but by adopting a bored, scornful air rather than proscribing them, which always seems to work in inverse proportion with students. The morally reprehensible situation of porn sites popping up regularly on lab desktops appears to have been solved by our Computer Services finally managing to bar such sites from the Intranet. This backfired last year, however, when one of my Child and Youth Development teams - suddenly - could not access the sites they had found on their theme, teenage pregnancy. This jeopardised completion of their project, and I had to petition Computer Services frantically to unblock the sites selected.

Table 1: Sample of the data obtained from the 2004 preliminary questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of respondents:</th>
<th>AN</th>
<th>CHEM</th>
<th>CHEM ENG</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Professional relevance of a Communication course:</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unsure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Used computers before:</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a few times</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Used the Internet before:</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>few</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Reflexive aspects of course design

Students are in fact reflecting on what they are doing throughout the course, as selecting websites which merit formal written and spoken report-back is quite a complex task: they have to assess the professional relevance of the websites they find, and also to evaluate them using a simple table rubric (e.g. How easy was the website to find, how long did it take to load...? etc.) The fact that students (and not their lecturers) are the “resident experts” on professional relevance means that they take more care in evaluating what they are doing, which is another reason why the work produced is above average. The fact that electronic discussion forums are public also lets students know how other students are doing, which helps them to pace their own progress. As mentioned above, formal testing initially had to be specially geared to the project, as mainstream testing was carried out according to the old transmission model, and the pilot studies were outcome-based. With the introduction of the pilot study outcomes into the mainstream courses, however, common Control Tests could be used across the board without disadvantaging students involved in the project. The reflexive aspect also involves course assessment, which requires ongoing monitoring of how students - and staff - are doing, as well as feedback from students at the end of each course. We now not only use course feedback questionnaires, but also preliminary questionnaires to assess where students are at the beginning of a course. The questionnaires are anonymous except to indicate which diploma group is involved, and we encourage students to say what they really think so that we can use their feedback to improve the course. Table 1 shows some of the statistics garnered in this way, and the figures suggest that we are getting better at motivating
students and showing how the Internet can be used for professional development. The figures also suggest that a large proportion of students would not have access to computers and the Internet without programmes such as the Comm. Skills Online project, and that computer skills and the amount of reading done improve as a result of the course. A further breakdown of the reading statistics suggested that students read mainly professionally related materials during the project, which improves their specialist subject knowledge as well as their reading skills.

Table 2: Feedback questionnaire results from 2003-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>students had little/no previous experience of computer use.</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students had little/no previous experience of the Internet.</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students did not have private access to computers.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students did not have private access to the Internet.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students said the course had good/very good motivation for students.</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students rated the course good/very good for professional relevance.</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students judged course guidance to be good/very good.</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students thought their course results were better than usual.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students said their computer skills had developed considerably.</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students said that they had read more/much more than usual.</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Conclusion
Two significant reflexive elements I have not yet dealt with are institutional recognition and international recognition, and I have saved these for the conclusion, as both have contributed materially to the success of the Comm. Skills Online project. The project has had tremendous support from DIT’s Online Learning Centre, whose staff have encouraged us to present at international conferences. We have had support both from our HOD, Carol de Kock, whose administrative workload has presented her from staffing on the project until this year, and from the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dr Kenneth Netshiombo. Our conference and publication record has in turn gained support from the DIT Research Office, with funding being provided for three international overseas computer conferences in 2005. Moreover, the project has emphasised that an English Department in a University of Technology needs to be equipped with more than just chalk and talk, with the result that we are now one of the best technically equipped English Departments in South Africa, and are close to obtaining the goal of our own subject-dedicated computer lab. Conferences and in-house presentations have added yet another layer of reflection to the Comm. Skills Online project in helping us to identify possible factors contributing to the overall success of the project. It is hoped that the design template tentatively outlined here will be of use in assisting other web-based learning practitioners to do likewise.

References


