

Adele Cushing, City and Islington College

June 28, 2011 via Skype

This section of the interview is meant for internal OPDF use to answer some more specific questions to our needs.

Q. We already talked a bit about how long the training session was, was there follow-up, monthly meetings...

Adele Cushing: The only thing to add, really, was that they were very vocal in the first project, the MENTOR ME, you know, went backwards and came forwards about what they thought. So yeah, we pretty much knew what we had to do in terms of training and support just through that first session. And then there was a lot of drop-in support, and we also had the libraries loaning out things so that people could go in to the libraries for the support as well as kind of dropping in to our office as well, so we had that.

Q. You've talked a bit about the applications they used, but it was all across different devices.

Adele Cushing: Yeah, in a couple of the projects I've done including the mentoring one, the use of the video recorder kind of increased. Because a lot of times people don't- not the video recorder, the voice recorder. Because a lot of people miss it, that it exists on their phone. And obviously now, in terms of what voice recognition- able to google something by just saying it, and the Dragon app which is the voice recognition software just being so accurate on the iPhone and the iPad, so the voice sort of playing more of a role, really. And speeding up, you know, what you produce, your production. As I say, it's the camera and the video they probably used the most. So in the most recent project I did, it was interesting, cause these were sort of mature women and they were confident with texting. And they actually continued to use texting with their studies as well, texting each other about what they were learning. But they found the use of sort of text language is hindering their understanding of what they were learning, so they stopped, and they started to actually write in text, in full language.

Q. That's interesting, because I've seen some literacy projects where people are reading more, but their responses are all in text speak, and the question is, is that better or worse? At least they're reading more, but...

Adele Cushing: Yeah, I mean, there's different opinions of that, isn't there, because some people think- well, some people that say it actually is good because it shows an understanding of the phonetics in language. You have to have an understanding of how words are spelled in order to summarize it. So that's what's been in the news over here, research about texting and literacy.

Q. Have you done any evaluation, and what did you evaluate?

Adele Cushing: Well, we did evaluate, as I said, the use of the technology, the kind of- the capabilities of people before the project and after the project. And in terms of IT capabilities of how they're using it to support their learning, as well. And as I said, you know, you get the usual kind of "I use my phone mostly for making calls". And then after the project, "now I can use it to go on the internet, and I didn't ever do that before". So that in the first project, in the first year, that was something that was quite key. There was a real increase of people who actually were starting to use smartphones to go on the internet, but that's because we were able to give them those types of devices that were enabled, that was people at the time didn't necessarily own their own, whereas now it's a bit more likely that if you buy a phone you'll be able to get on the internet with it. I think I sort of evaluated from the students' point of view, evaluated that more, in terms of their IT skills, their technology skills. And then with the mentors, it was a case of how much they would have been in contact and how they felt that the phone had contributed to that. But I'm not convinced that in any way that, you know, this device or this way of working makes the difference. It actually kind of helps them being part of a project, that they're encouraged that this is what we have to do, we have to be more in touch with our mentees. It's like with the level three students, wanting to see them progress, they were in a project and they got talked to about progression and going to university from the very beginning of their course, cause they were involved with the project. So it's definitely like a holistic thing, and it's about that sort of regular communication and actually perhaps the fact that it's a mobile phone actually further enables that communication, because that's what you use to communicate anyway, and you have a discussion around why you're using it for learning, and these things come out.

I did do surveys, I'm remember what was on the surveys at Survey Monkey. And I think the full report with all the sort of stats, I've probably still got somewhere if you want to look at it. But I kind of feel, because that particular project now is 2009, which is smartphoneland is quite a long time ago, so.

Q. How did you measure the effectiveness or success of the project?

Adele Cushing: As I mentioned before about the organizational change, taking that back, the impact it had on the students that we were working with in terms of the mentoring and the coaching and then the fact that they went into the classroom and then used the ideas with their students as well. So I think probably, to be honest, the major impact was with the teaching and learning rather than this area, with the mentoring. But it was a means to kind of facilitating that really going out into the classrooms and convincing the senior managers in the college that this is a good way of working, and something that's futuristic. It's coming, and you know- in pretty much all colleges now, we're in a situation where we're like, we have to provide access for students with their own devices to wireless and things like that, so. And obviously in the long term we're hoping that that would save us some technology money, but it remains to be seen, because you've still got to provide for students that don't have, and you've still got to have (inaudible) in terms of the working space, and use of desktops as well. So we're not necessarily there yet.

Q. Did faculty communicate with each other to problem-solve?

Adele Cushing: Yeah. And we, as well, sort of being project manager, you pick up practice anyway that's going on, so when you then do training you can then have suggestions from practice you got somewhere else. That's what I quite enjoy, that being sort of project managing these kind of things.