

How was it for you?

*Evaluating the  
Online HE Study Skills Package  
at City of Bristol College*



# Background

- Foundation Degree students at City of Bristol College wanted a Study Skills package they could access away from college
- Staff delivering Study Skills needed materials for their teaching sessions

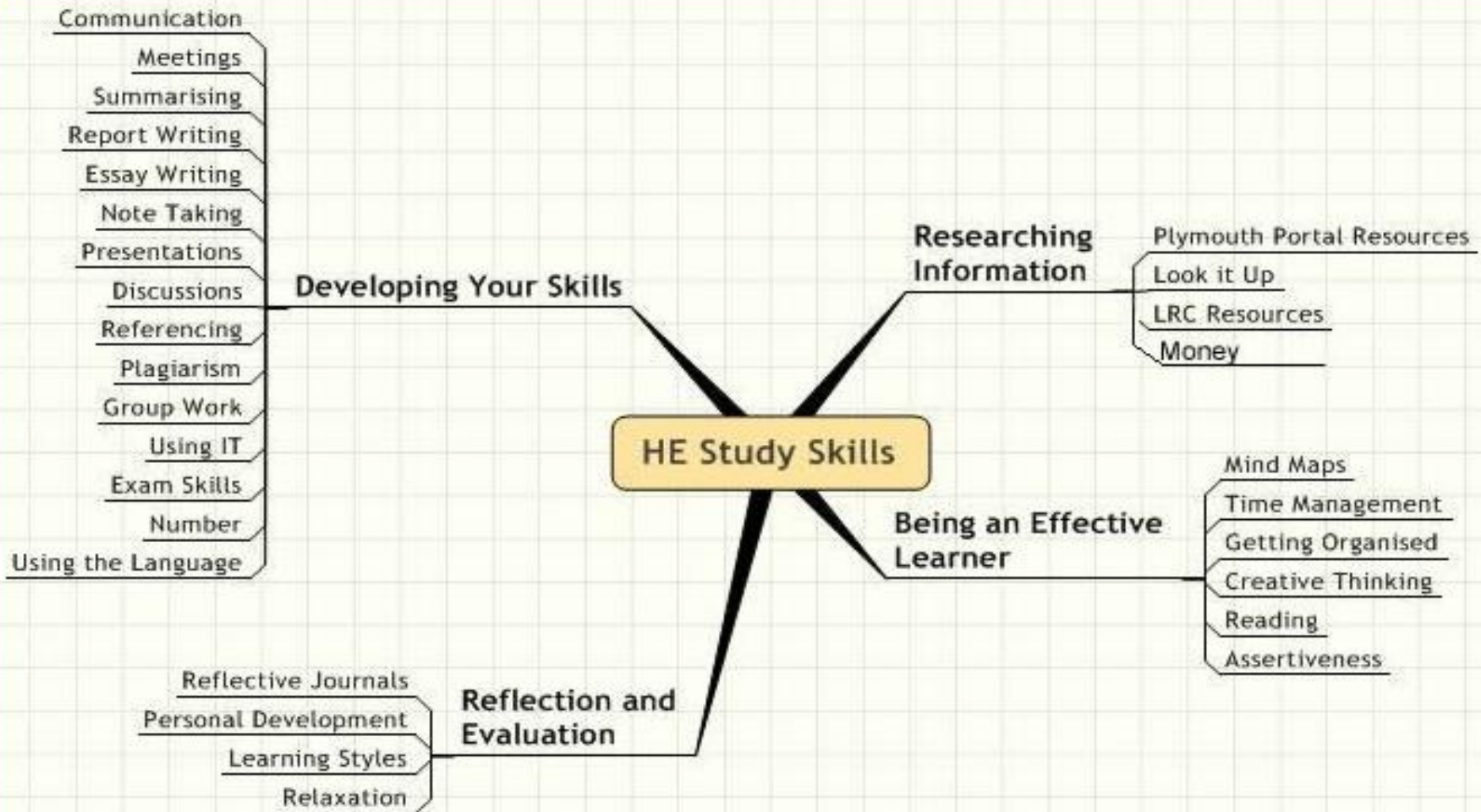


# The HE Study Skills Course

- Available to all HE students and staff
- Blackboard VLE
- Using existing and new materials
- Variety of approaches to suit different learning styles
- 200 separate materials grouped under the headings of:
  - Developing Your Skills
  - Researching Information
  - Being an Effective Learner
  - Reflection and Evaluation



# Structure of the Course



# Anticipated Issues

- Awareness
- Accessibility
- Navigation



# Evaluation Methods

- Analysis of access statistics on Blackboard
- Initial questionnaires to staff and students
- Follow-up questionnaires to staff and students
- Focus groups



# Outcomes - Initial Questionnaires

- All students and staff interested in using the materials
- *‘Tremendous boost for learning’ (staff)*
- *‘Will help me focus on study and fit it round my life’ (student)*



# Outcomes - Focus Groups

- *‘Excellent stuff for tutor use’ (staff)*
- *‘Helped me with bibliographies and referencing’ (student)*
- *‘Looks useful – I’ll use it now I know it’s there.’ (student)*



# Total number of hits

01.09.06 – 18.06.07

10021 hits



# Anticipated Issues.....

- Awareness - still needs addressing
- Accessibility – enrolment and log-in problems
- Navigation - not a problem



# What Went Well?

- Students
  - accessed the resources
  - benefited from the resources
- Staff
  - found resources useful



# Lessons from the Research Project

- Support tutors so they guide students
- Signpost materials, indicating level and content
- More self-evaluation tests & feedback linked to materials for further development



# Pedagogy

The learner as a passive recipient of knowledge



# Pedagogy

The  
independent  
learner



# Ways of Using Blackboard: Three Models

1. A source of information
2. Providing information and discussion
3. Facilitating a learning community

McConnell, D *E-Learning Groups and Communities*, (OUP 2006)



# Model 1

A source of information

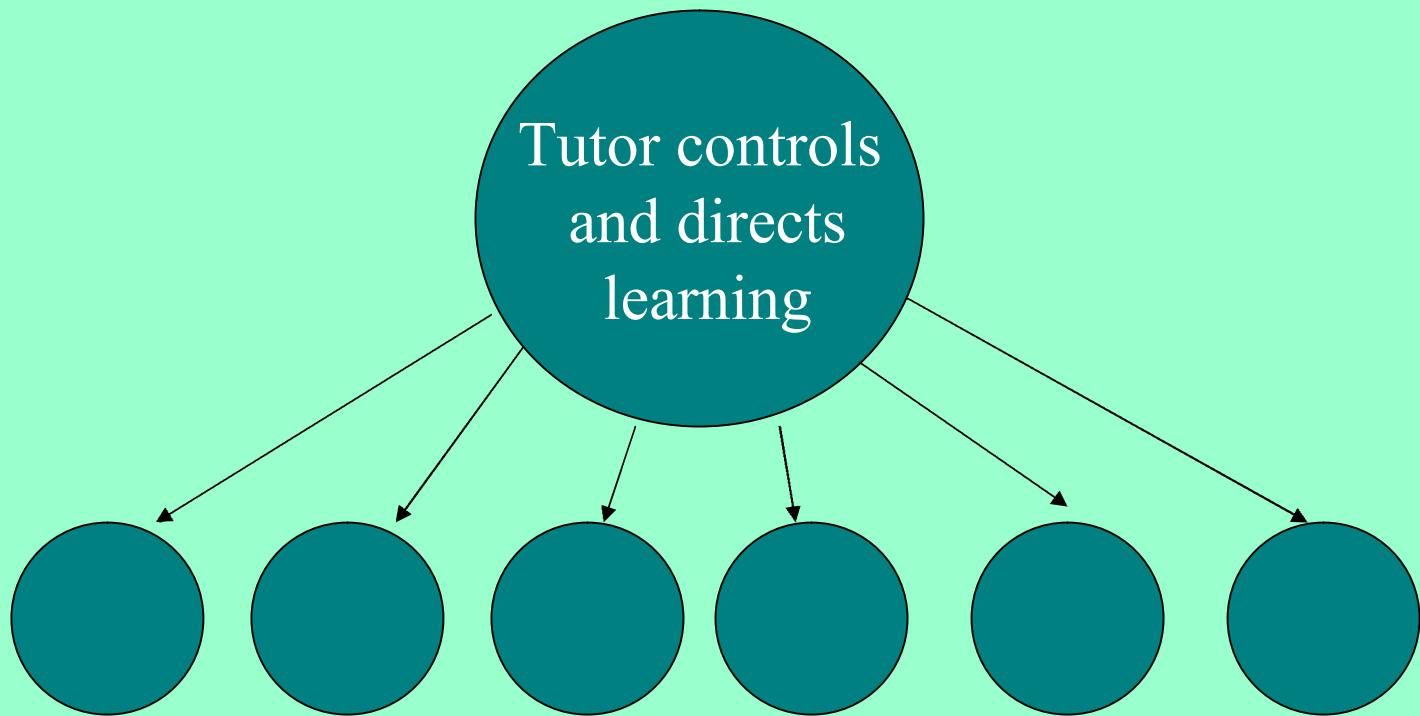


# Course Documents available on Blackboard

- Useful for students who mislay handouts
- Learners can choose to access materials
- Store PowerPoint presentations



# Tutor / Learner Roles Diagram



Learners receive learning



# Tutor Skills

- Making Word and PowerPoint files attractive and accessible
- Uploading files to appropriate locations
- Demonstrating usage to students
- Providing a variety of materials to suit different learning styles



# Learner Skills

- Accessing the material on Blackboard
  - Knowing how to log in and access files
  - Having the self-discipline to log in



# Model 2

Providing information and discussion

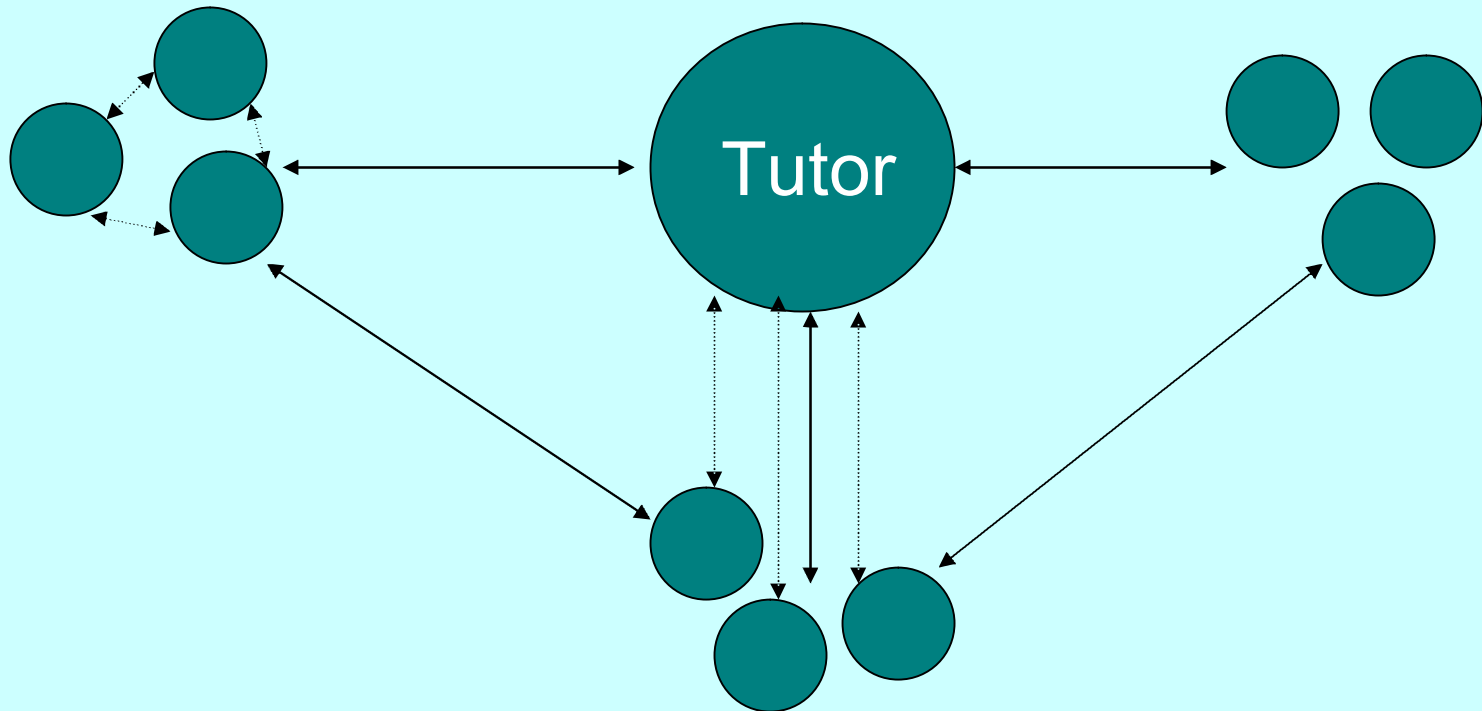


# Discussion Groups: Tutor Directed

- Questions posed by tutor
- Students receive knowledge and are expected to show understanding of it.
- Some collaborative learning
- Discussion used to **apply** knowledge, to construct something new.



# Tutor/Learner Roles



# Tutor Skills

- Setting up Discussion Forums
- Devising questions so that learners will apply the knowledge to their own experience
- Motivating and encouraging contributions



# Learner Skills

- Logging in regularly
- Accessing materials
- Contributing to discussions
- Leading and summarising discussions



# Model 3

Facilitating a learning community

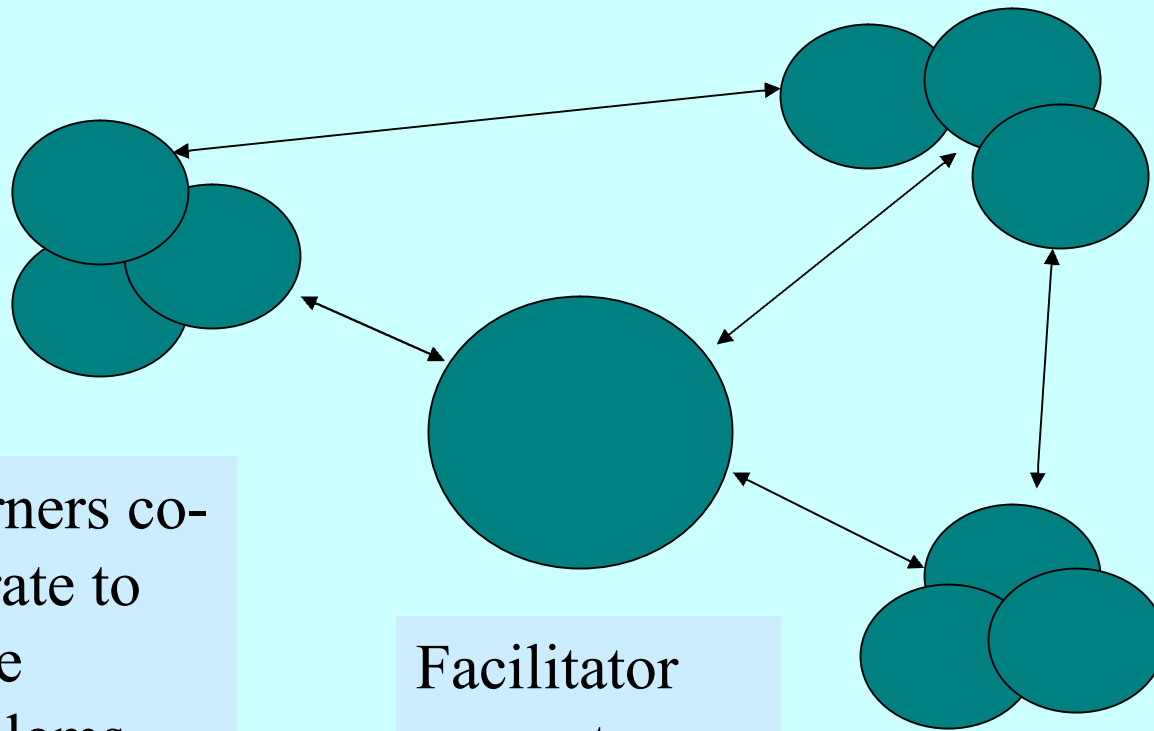


# Discussion Groups: Learner Directed

- Action Learning Sets where learners collaborate to
  - solve problems,
  - share information
  - help each other.



# Facilitator/Learner Roles



Learners co-  
operate to  
solve  
problems

Facilitator  
supports



# Learner Skills

- Forming action learning sets
- Co-operating to solve problems
- Sharing information and expertise
- Contributing ideas
- Constructing their own information
- Developing as independent learners



# Tutor Skills

- Facilitator of discussion
- Critical observer
- Co-expert
- Student



# Quotes from independent learners

- *‘Helped to access relevant information at a time which was suitable’*
- *‘Helped develop my academic writing’*
- *‘Gives me information on how to improve’*



# Lessons for the Design of Online Learning

**E. Freestanding - accessed as and when required. 'Pick and mix' approach**

**D. Woven: f2f + VLE. Tutor facilitation of problem-centred learning.**

**C. Some online materials, quizzes, external links and discussions as student support. Mainly f2f.**

**B: Discussion groups used to provide support to learners.**

**A: Online reference material.**



# Online Reference Material

- **Provide clear signposts to content**
- **Make it clear whether to read or act on a document**
- **Make Word docs screen-friendly**
- **Keep content 'bite-sized'**
- **Add images**
- **Check PowerPoints make sense without tutor to talk it through**



# Discussion Groups to Support Learners

**Check students know how to access**

**Encourage student participation**

**Provide lots of introductory activities**

**Be aware of possible misinterpretation of messages**



# Some Online Materials

**Design quizzes to check learning and provide feedback**

**Use external links to provide 'extension' activities**

**Structure discussion in small groups and chase up 'lurkers' and non-contributors**

**Keep materials live and relevant to encourage regular access**



# Woven (f2f + VLE)

- **Use discussion groups to promote problem-solving learning (action learning sets)**
- **Schedule the programme carefully: access is asynchronous not random**
- **Keep activities tightly linked to learning outcomes**
- **Build in regular assessment to monitor progress and motivate**



# Free-standing

E.

- Guide learners to access content
- Structure navigation
- Adapt materials to suit various learning styles
- Signpost materials – level and content
- Link self-evaluation activities to developmental materials



# Finding the Right Blend

- Blended learning gives us a new set of ingredients
- We need to experiment, practise and evaluate to see which recipes give the best results



# Thanks

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Jane Wills

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# Comments/info

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