

## “A massive leap”

By Joy Drever

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I was bored. After working in local government developing ICT infrastructure and training for 10 years I decided I wanted a challenge. And what could be a bigger challenge than becoming a full time student when you are supposed to be a responsible adult with bills to pay?

It turned out that paying the bills was the easy part... I hate it when people say “it was a journey”, but this definitely was a journey of self-discovery.

I handed in my notice and began the E-learning Multimedia Consultancy MSc course in October 2005. I chose this course because of my interest in e-learning, which in 2005 was still in its infancy.

On the first day that I started I was pretty confident that I wouldn't have any problems, and then I walked into the classroom and looked around and the other students began to introduce themselves. They were teachers , lecturers , educational development strategists ... and me. And I had a massive confidence crisis. I thought I would not be able to work to the same academic standard as my peers - or even to the standard that is necessary for a master's degree.

What I soon discovered was that my experiences in different roles and in different organizations counted. I was able to put forward valuable opinions based on my experience and evaluation of instructional design.

The first assignment I had to write was frankly a nightmare and I clearly

remember sitting in Sue's office with my head in my hands wondering what on earth I was doing.

So what did I gain? I would say that the main thing from studying for a master's degree was confidence. But also, and perhaps just as importantly, I discovered that I need to work with people, I need communication and discussion – and ELMAC provided that.

The way that the course is structured – communication - social constructivism and experiential learning - giving you the opportunity to discuss things in class, post questions and read other people's ideas online. I took part in videoconferencing with students in the Netherlands and Belgium, and had discussions with tutors on an equal level – it was the ideal way for me to learn.

I discovered a whole new dimension to my elearning experience.

Those people who I was in awe of in week 1 soon became friends and we soon became a strong, supportive community.

Being involved in project work with international students, helping plan annual student conferences and also speaking in front of my peers at the conferences has helped build my confidence in my abilities.

But most bizarrely, I realized that technology isn't the b-all-and-end-all of adult learning! In the early 'noughties' I thought that e-learning would be the answer to professional training delivery issues - trainers and tutors could be replaced by skilled learning technologists who provided online materials.

ELAMC helped me develop a much more balanced approach to using technology in education and an appreciation of the problems that are encountered by students on a daily basis.

Today I am an advocate of blended learning - I completed my dissertation at the end of 2007 and have never really left SHU.

I have gone on to work on a number of e-learning projects and I now work as an associate lecturer in two departments - and I think I do include more technologies than most lecturers. I'm always looking for opportunities to

make learning interesting and finding different ways to support learning through technology.

For example, by creating a website that supports a module or by using Twitter to share interesting articles.

But most importantly, I appreciate the problems students have – we're told they are a generation of 'Digital Natives' but many aren't.

So, for me it certainly changed the way I approach teaching and it really helped my self-confidence.

I am still an active member of the TELIC community – you might meet me at the next student conference and all because of the ELMAC experience - which for somebody who was terrified of the idea of being University student only a few years ago, is a massive leap.