ICT-COACHES: AN EXAMPLE OF A STRATEGIC NETWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED TEACHING AND LEARNING

Abstract: A network of ICT coaches has been formed at Umeå University, Sweden, with the aim of creating a grass-roots ICT support to inspire, support and assist staff within their own institutions in planning, developing and implementing technology enhanced teaching and learning. This presentation will describe the reasoning behind their creation and their strategic importance for professional development.

Keywords: strategic development, ICT competence, coaching, professional development

Seminar proposal: The objective of this seminar is to describe the purpose and role of ICT (interactive communications technology) - coaches AT Umeå University, Sweden, and also to discuss their strategic importance for the development of technology-enhanced teaching and learning at the university.

Over the last three years, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Umeå University, Sweden, has run a project ICT competency development to enhance teaching and learning as part of the university’s overarching activity plan. The aim of the project was to provide support for teaching staff and management at all levels in the acquisition of the skills necessary for the pedagogical implementation of ICT in education. Within the framework of this project, CTL interviewed all heads of department / program managers at Umeå University to investigate their views and concerns about the use of ICT in teaching. During these discussions the future aims of the institution and their expected need for support from the university with regard to the development of ICT in education were discussed.

During these interviews it became apparent that there was a both a desire to share experiences concerning the use and development of ICT-assisted teaching with other departments, and also a growing need to get help in their development of net-based courses and programmes. In other words, they needed an "ICT-coach" who could help with the didactic / pedagogical design of content, communication and examination in creation and development of courses.

To fulfill this need, CTL has built up a network of ICT-coaches who have experience and an interest in working with ICT in their teaching. The purpose of the ICT coaches is to support the development of technology-enhanced learning in their respective faculties and departments by providing expertise, contacts and inspiration firmly rooted in their own discipline. This network gathers and links experienced teachers in various institutions into a wider network. One of the advantages of this network is that ICT coaches in different departments and faculties always have someone to turn to when problems arise.

The role of the Centre for Teaching & Learning is to unite and support the network and to provide a platform for discussions concerning e.g. difficulties encountered, possible solutions to common problems, evaluation of IT-tools or the joint development of ideas. CTL also offers a program of short courses, seminars and workshops that create the basis for and confidence in the ICT-coach role. Furthermore, the ICT coaches have priority access to training in the ICT field and can also act as test pilots for new technologies or participate in research projects.

The network is a grass-roots support group that can raise questions concerning the pedagogical use of ICT in teaching and learning and developmental needs to a higher, management level. Via the ICT coaches information related to ICT issues at Umeå University become more widely available, while new educational ideas of value to net-based education are continuously disseminated.