



Online Discourse, Dialogue and Support In Tutoring Distance Learning Students at Master's Level

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University tutoring now involves far more e-learning and online engagement between the tutor and the tutee than the more traditional approach of face to face tutorials and seminars. As Turney [1], drawing upon the work of Connolly [2] and Sharpe [3], concludes 'Technology is increasingly being exploited for learning and teaching in universities around the world' Building effective working relationships, in an online environment, between the tutor and tutee is therefore crucial if students are to thrive and succeed in their university studies. Indeed Seok [4], in discussing the transactional distance between the e-teacher and eLearners, highlights concerns about highly structured programmes that have low levels of dialogue between the instructor and learners.

Increasingly, school leaders and aspiring leaders are choosing to engage in continuing professional development that lead to master's level qualifications. In doing so they find themselves placed in the situation of becoming student learners but in a very different and often unfamiliar learning environment that involves online distance learning, tutoring and support.

Many of these students lack confidence in their ability to conduct research and engage in academic study and writing, because they have not had recent experience of academic writing; some students may not have been involved in writing at a higher level since completing their first degree many years before. As experienced professionals, established in their careers with management responsibilities, there are many demands on their time, leaving less time to pursue external studies for further qualifications, such as, Masters in Education.

This paper explores approaches to online tutoring that can help to build student confidence and competence in Master's level study and overcome potential barriers to learning. It examines the relationships between tutors and tutees, drawing upon the personal experiences of tutors and tutees with a significant focus on the dialogue, discourse and support as evidenced in email and other forms of electronic communication.