Greater flexibility for learning

Brian Smith and Peter Reed take a look at the benefits of computer-based learning

Computer-based learning (CBL) can take several forms. Some programmes are designed to support face-to-face teaching in academic institutions, while others are designed to be used in the workplace or at home without teaching support.

In its purest form, CBL relies heavily on users enhancing their knowledge and understanding by following the programme content alone. While most students are capable of reflecting on and applying their learning in clinical practice, unsupported CBL can be better or worse than teacher-supported CBL.

Employers often prefer CBL because of its convenience and because staff can make use of development opportunities without being released from the work area. Many commercial CBL packages offer the user a rich learning tool that can often be tailored to their specific needs. Nevertheless, these are often used in the workplace without tutorial support.

TEACHERS SHOULD LOOK AT LEARNING TECHNIQUES THAT INSPIRE AND RETAIN INTEREST

Work at Edge Hill University, Lancashire, offers some insight into learning behaviour associated with CBL and the best way of using this technology.

In higher education institutions, CBL can be used to supplement learning in a conventional classroom environment. Here, the tutor places the software in context by guiding the students’ learning experiences towards the course learning outcomes. CBL can also be used in a wider virtual learning environment.

Involving video learning, wikis, blogs and bulletin boards, for example, where most learning takes place electronically.

Tutor involvement with students is more often in the shape of workshops and seminars. Used in this way, there are many benefits for students and their tutors and mentors in using CBL packages as an integral part of a programme of study.

At Edge Hill, the use of CBL packages in planned virtual learning exercises creates a more flexible, yet structured experience.

Effective teaching

Supplemented with conventional tutorials and support from expert clinical teachers, these exercises can be enjoyable and effective teaching methods. However, using CBL packages in isolation can preclude the discussions and debates that help students to apply their knowledge in practice.

As Simone Bedford explained in a previous article (careers January 16) teachers and education commissioners need to look at learning techniques that inspire and retain students’ interest, motivate them to be good nurses, and enhance their skills in the workplace. The group interactions possible with CBL can achieve these objectives.

Brian Smith is senior lecturer and solstice fellow, and Peter Reed is project manager and faculty learning technology adviser, Edge Hill University, Lancashire

RESOURCE FILE
E-mentoring and moderation resources www.atimod.com/research/publications.shtml
RN e-learning resources www.rcn.org.uk/development/learning