Foreword

A combination of drivers have encouraged the introduction of e-learning into a wide range of educational contexts—from global and economic imperatives, through national policy directives to institutional strategies and, sometimes, the commitment and enthusiasm of individual teachers and learners. What can sometimes get lost is a consideration of the underlying pedagogic purpose in implementing technologies to support and enhance learning. It is a significant challenge for teachers in higher education (HE) to take the time to re-think their curricula, articulate the underlying pedagogic approaches, and consider how the range of available technologies can support this. It is far easier to upload existing tried and tested materials into the institutional virtual learning environment or course management system.

This book tells a different story and is the result of some excellent work led by clear pedagogic intent in the geography discipline. It presents a range of approaches taken by this multi-national, multi-disciplinary team to enhance the student learning experience. Working collaboratively across disciplines and cultures presents many challenges, particularly in developing common understandings, and is often a huge learning experience for those involved. Creating, developing and embedding learning materials within a curriculum is a complex process involving a range of individuals, and the DialogPLUS team developed imaginative approaches to facilitate this across the Atlantic, where the usual technical, legal and cultural constraints to sharing content were magnified.

Detailed practical case studies in human geography, environmental management, geomorphology, and earth observation are provided. These describe the various approaches to making the resources available in different learning contexts. Whilst clearly of significant interest to those teaching in geography and allied subject areas, the case studies also have genuine relevance to anyone interested in enhancing the learner experience of finding, using, and critically engaging with real data to carry out authentic tasks.

The Digital Libraries in the Classroom Programme was a joint venture between the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) in the United Kingdom and the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the United States of America. The four projects aimed to transform learning and teaching by bringing emerging technologies and readily available digital content into mainstream educational use. What is evident from the work of all the projects, and what is illustrated well in this book, are the innovative and wide ranging outcomes that span digital repositories, learning resources, pedagogy, and staff development, implementing institutional change and facilitating globally networked learning opportunities.

It is always tempting to focus on the tangible outputs from development projects and for this team these were significant. As well as the "learning nuggets" themselves, they developed the DialogPLUS toolkit, which provides a practical tool to take teachers through the learning design process and reflects the team's thoughtful and collaborative approach to curriculum design. What excited me about this work was the value of the learning process for the members of the team and the evidence of significant

shifts in perception for both the academic team and the educational technologists. If as a reader you are prepared to be as reflective and thoughtful about your own practice you could benefit from much more than the hugely practical content.

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Lou McGill *was formerly a programme manager on the JISC eLearning team, responsible for two large programmes of work which have focussed on transforming the learning experience by implementing innovative e-learning solutions to a range of institutional or subject discipline challenges – the JISC/NSF Digital Libraries in the Classroom Programme and the Scottish Funding Council e-Learning Transformation Programme. Prior to joining JISC, McGill worked at the University of Strathclyde for the DIDET Project (digital libraries for global distributed innovative design and teamwork), one of the JISC/NSF Digital Libraries in the Classroom initiatives. Whilst at Strathclyde she was a member of the VLE Implementation Group and was involved in developing a consultation process for the development of the University Teaching and Learning through Technology Strategy. She was a member of the JISC eLearning and pedagogy Experts Group and was part of a team that carried out the "Research study on the effectiveness of resources, tools and support services used by practitioners in designing and delivering e-learning activities." Prior to this McGill had 18 years experience as a professional information specialist in the adult education world, working in both institutional and academic libraries. She has always worked closely with educators to ensure that libraries and librarians are considered essential components of the learning environment. As a teacher of information literacy she has employed and evaluated a variety of e-learning technologies to enhance and support student learning.*