



Improving staff capacity to support student learning in the digital age

Key Words

Blended Learning, Digital Literacy, Professional Development, Capacity Building, Student Success,

Abstract

We live in a blended world; technology is ubiquitous from the rapid expansion of the internet of things and widespread adoption of mobile technologies. The distinctions that previously separated online and offline life have blurred. Many tertiary institutions are undertaking a process to incorporate digital technologies into learning by implementing Blending Learning projects. Often the goal of these projects is that students will have a more engaging learning experience with greater flexibility and student success. However, in order for staff to successfully incorporate blended learning methodologies, they need to understand blended learning pedagogies, be confident with their digital literacy skills, and have an active teacher presence which extends from the face-to-face through to the online environment. As Rogers (p1, 2003) identified 'many innovations require a lengthy period of many years from the time when they become available to the time when they are widely adopted. Therefore a common problem ...is how to speed up the rate of diffusion of an innovation.' At Victoria University, the solution for rapidly and significantly increasing the ability of staff to deliver high quality blended learning was to appoint a team of learning designers. Each learning designer was allocated to work with academic staff in one of the University's seven Colleges. A key goal is to build staff capacity - specifically to embrace blended pedagogies, increase digital literacy skills, and extend teacher presence from the face to face through to the online space. What was required for this project was more about enabling and supporting staff to learn and to take responsibility for their own learning than delivering a series of workshops for them to 'learn from' (Hart 2017). The program we developed has many layers and modes of delivery, including teaching academics how to: plan, design, deliver and implement blended learning activities; develop their ideas; use the tools available; create multimedia components; and translate in-class teaching skills to maintain a presence in the online space. In order to meet the needs of staff who have heavy workloads and competing priorities, we have adopted a range of delivery methods. These include 1-on-1 planned or just-in-time meetings, formal group sessions for both large and small groups at College level, University-wide Shared Practice Forums and Learning Modules and resources provided online. Because the learning designers are embedded into the University's Colleges, there is also the opportunity for informal corridor conversations. This model of providing learning experience that suits the need of the learner in terms of pace, place and mode is an exemplar of how blended learning can be put in place to maximise opportunities for flexibility. In this paper we will discuss the impact of this method to build capacity build in terms of the types of learning experiences that students at our institution are now experiencing and how this has supported their learning.

References

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