



Operationalising a whole of institution approach: Working through theory(ies)

Abstract

It is well known to tertiary educators that universities are experiencing the effects of policy agendas that promote massification and internationalisation (Marginson, 2012). Additionally, more recent political discourses around teaching quality and student success (Department of Education, 2017) have the potential to develop into policies that could see further pressures on universities to increase services to both staff and students. Across Australia, academic language and learning (ALL) units and ALL practitioners are responding to these multiple pressures by reframing their roles and the ways in which they are working to meet the 'moving feast' of expectations. This paper reports on the evolution of the ALL unit at James Cook University in North Queensland as those at the 'coalface' attempt to grapple with increasing and increasingly varied demands on their expertise within a contracting financial environment. It details the whole of institution approach to delivering strategic, scalable and sustainable actions intended to support student learning across multiple physical campuses, study centres and the virtual environment that led to the unit receiving an Australian Award for University Teaching for Programs that Enhance Learning in 2016. As acknowledged by the Award, this student focussed and staff capacity building whole of institution approach has delivered clear benefits in terms of retention, engagement and achievement for the diverse student cohort at James Cook University. Additionally, the paper will articulate the theoretical frameworks that inform and shape practice in an environment where multiple demands on expertise require agile and informed responses. The concepts of 'practice ecologies' (Kemmis, Edwards-Grove, Wilkinson & Hardy, 2012) and 'practice architectures' (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) are used to describe and explore the complex environments in which these ALL practitioners are successfully shaping and reshaping their practice in response to the cultural-discursive, social-political and material-economic dimensions of their work environments. This paper provides background and context for a workshop and a poster at this conference prepared by our JCU colleagues that drill further into specific activities of the Learning Centre and seek to engage in conversation regarding practice with other conference delegates.

References

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