



Chapter III

Moving to Blended Delivery in a Polytechnic: Shifting the Mindset of Faculty and Institutions

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Abstract

What strategies and support are effective for shifting the mindset of expert teachers to become expert e-learning teachers? This chapter outlines the process followed in a large polytechnic institution to introduce online and other technologies to begin to replace the traditional with more flexible, blended alternatives, delivered through a commercial course management system (CMS). Integral to the process was a matrix, devised to assist the academic development unit when working with faculty to make decisions about the degree of e-learning appropriate for their purposes. The matrix has guided the incorporation of technologies for teaching across the whole institute. The chapter outlines the institutional support that was provided for the different levels on the matrix, which enabled expert teachers to retain control over a quality learning experience for their students, and briefly explores some of the issues that arose and lessons that were learned.

Introduction

The Manukau Institute of Technology focuses on vocational education and training, offering mainly certificate and diploma qualifications together with an increasing number of degree programs. In 2000, the Blackboard course management system was introduced at the Institute with the main goal of providing students with greater flexibility of time, place, and approach to learning. Unlike the models used by many other postsecondary institutions (Epper & Bates, 2001), the Institute chose to have the e-learning initiative (planning and supporting of learning by technologically supported means) driven from within the Centre for Educational Development (the academic staff development section of the Institute) rather than have it aligned with the Information Technology Services department or in a department of its own.

The Centre for Educational Development (CED) reports to the Executive Director Academic and includes a team who assists with curriculum design and assessment practices, research, and program review. The same section contains the educational resource production unit and is also responsible for delivering academic professional development across the Institute, which includes the compulsory qualification in tertiary teaching, which all academic staff take.

The integration of academic development with e-learning has meant there is one place for academics to go for support, and the use of learning technology is seen as a logical extension of the teaching repertoire. The integrated support model described functions well in a polytechnic environment. As it has proven cost effective, the centralization of e-learning support services in this way may have relevance for the wider tertiary environment, although this case study is limited to working within the governance model used in polytechnics.

Expert Teachers are Planners and Managers of Learning

Expert teachers are excellent managers of their classrooms. They understand the fundamentals of good curriculum design and can translate that into day-to-day learning outcomes for their diverse students. They understand student-centered teaching and learning—*placing learners at the heart of the learning process and meeting their needs* (Edwards, 2001)—and they have a range of strategies they can call upon to facilitate the learning process. They unconsciously alter their behavior in the classroom based on the feedback they are receiving during the teaching and learning process. With reflection, they can eloquently articulate what they are doing to a beginning teacher in the tertiary sector and pass on their good practice.

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