

Chapter 15

Re-Imagining Teaching for Technology-Enriched Learning Spaces: An Academic Development Model

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ABSTRACT

New technology-enriched learning spaces are a focus of institutional investment to address the identified shortcomings of traditional teaching and learning environments. Academic development, an area that has received little attention in this context, can be designed to provide strong opportunities for university teachers to re-imagine their teaching for these new spaces while also building their leadership capacity. This chapter discusses challenges that teachers face in transforming their teaching practices and proposes a model for academic development to support this. Two case studies demonstrate the flexibility and efficacy of the model and provide pointers for further adoption in the higher education context.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights the need for a stronger focus on academic development to enable teachers to re-imagine their teaching for technology-enriched learning spaces. In order to assist academics to adapt to new teaching and learning environments a translation process is required. This process should include identifying the opportunities offered by

technology-enriched formal learning spaces for teachers' own contexts and re-designing student learning with peer support and review. Specifically, the model outlined here seeks to improve support for academic teachers in the design of pedagogical activities for technology-enriched learning spaces while simultaneously building leadership capacity to sustain change at local disciplinary levels.

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BACKGROUND

In recent years the higher education sector has recognised that the spaces within which university teaching takes place can have a major impact on student learning.

The spaces in which we work, live and learn can have profound effects on how we feel, how we behave, how we perform ... spaces can also limit the possibilities of our activity, restricting us to old modes of working and thinking (Watson, 2007, p.260).

Consequently, many universities have realised that in order to promote more active, student-centred teaching and learning activities, different physical and virtual spaces are required to those traditionally available in most higher education institutions. Accordingly, sizeable investment is being made in designing and creating technology-enriched formal spaces across higher education institutions (Oblinger, 2005; Watson, 2007). These spaces are innovative physical learning environments equipped with a wide-range of technology tools and are designed to support new ways of teaching and learning. While there are significant differences in the types and purposes of the spaces being provided, common characteristics that define these innovative formal spaces are:

- the use of technology to support learning and teaching activities and
- the requirement for flexibility; and increasingly adaptability.

These new technology-enriched learning spaces are designed and built to support active, social, collaborative and independent learning. Consequently, these spaces, which offer a rapidly expanding range of technologies and configurations, confront traditional assumptions about teaching and learning. In turn, this creates challenges for teachers working in these new spaces

to re-imagine their teaching, learning designs and practices and actively promote more student engagement in the learning process.

Physically, these new learning spaces are usually visually attractive, designed for a range of educational purposes and equipped with state-of-the-art technologies. However, there is reportedly some tension between the desire to justify the expenditure on these new spaces in terms of enriched student learning, and the support of innovative teaching and learning practices (Pearshouse, et al., 2009). While the spaces have been designed with a view to transforming student learning and knowledge creation (Punie, 2007), little attention has been given to helping mainstream university teachers to transform or re-imagine their teaching practices in ways that these spaces and technologies can afford. When confronted with these new technology-enriched spaces, many university teachers feel ill-equipped to re-imagine their teaching practices so have reservations in relation to the commitment required to capitalise on the affordances enabled by these spaces. Furthermore, a focus on research in the promotion processes of many higher education institutions leaves little time to develop new pedagogical understandings and skills to effectively utilise technology-enriched learning spaces. University teachers require opportunities and time to reconcile their pedagogical beliefs, beliefs about technologies and the pedagogical affordances inherent in these spaces with their pedagogical contexts (Steel, 2009a). A crucial part of this re-imagining process is to create opportunities for teachers to rethink their learning designs so that they can effectively harness the potential teaching and learning opportunities offered by these spaces.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF RE-IMAGINING TEACHING

A significant problem for higher education institutions is that the complexities involved in changing

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