

Chapter 1

Managing Expectations: A Changing Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Expectations of, and by, students and staff in the classroom have been well researched. Yet, still there is a gap between the expectations of students and what they experience in their studies. The classroom itself is changing with the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies into the mix. Further changes are being driven by the changing profile of a tertiary student in the twenty first century. Education will not fulfill its goal if the gap in expectations is not addressed. The discrepancy in expectations is explored from the perspective of students and staff and strategies for bridging the gap and enhancing eLearning in the Web 2.0 environment are offered. The chapter begins with a scenario that demonstrates the issues and concludes with suggestions to avoid them in the future. In doing so, the key drivers of change in the learning landscape in Australia are identified and the impact these may have on staff and student expectations is explored.

SETTING THE SCENE

It is Friday afternoon. Jane is heading home after a busy week at work. She has an assignment due on Monday morning so is keen to get started once she has cooked dinner for the family. While on

the train she downloads the assignment onto her smart phone and starts reading it. She decides that it is relatively straightforward but there is one section she is not sure how to tackle. So she sends her lecturer a short email from her phone confident that she will have plenty of time to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3649-1.ch001

complete the assignment by 9am on Monday. On Monday morning Dr Johns arrives at his office before his first lecture with enough time to check his messages. He had intended to have a relaxing weekend bushwalking but had a PhD thesis to examine (the report was due in today) and four conference papers to review (also due today). He is surprised to find a number of emails from one of his students. The first had arrived on Friday at about 5:15pm, a short message obviously sent from a smart phone. The second email had been sent later that evening with a rather longer explanation of the information and guidance the student required in order to complete the assignment which was due before 9am today. The third email had been sent on Saturday morning. The student was showing signs of concern as Dr Johns had not yet responded to her enquiry. There were yet more emails from Jane sent on Saturday and Sunday, each using language more irate than the last, the final one indicated that she was extremely upset at the lack of communication from Dr Johns. This one also indicated that she had not expected a university, which claimed to be student-centred and flexible, would treat their students in such a disrespectful manner and that she would be lodging a formal complaint about the matter.

INTRODUCTION

Managing student expectations in a classroom setting is a well researched area with many pedagogical and administrative processes having been developed by teachers since teaching began! In the late twentieth century information and communications technology (ICT) tools were introduced into the classroom with dramatic effect. Suddenly students and teachers were expected to be computer literate and be willing and able to use these new, innovative tools to support teaching and learning. Hiltz (1994, p. 259) suggested that “what we are going to see in the future are more virtual universities”, that the “meaning of the ‘university’ will change, and the idea of a

‘campus’ as we know it may disappear. It is now possible to run a university from a closet”. This expectation that the bricks and mortar classroom would disappear in favour of technology supported virtual learning centres for example, has proved to be unfounded and, as Burdett (2003, p. 84) suggests, “despite anticipated benefits ... ICT is not embraced enthusiastically nor completely by all academics”.

With hindsight we know that these changes in the classroom are an ongoing process. Face-to-face teaching is still the core business of educational institutions at all levels. But the classroom has been enhanced and, in many cases, transformed with the introduction of ICT tools. Interactive white boards, laptop computers and social media for example are used extensively to enhance the learning experience of students throughout the education system (see for example Preston & Mowbray, 2008; Hemmi, Bayne & Land, 2009). Learning management systems (LMS) have also been widely adopted providing opportunities for students to gain access to learning resources and activities without temporal or geographic boundaries. There are opportunities for students and staff to communicate with each other and for students to be supported in ways that are just not possible in a traditional face-to-face setting alone.

At the same time as these changes have been occurring in the classroom, the profile of a tertiary student has also changed. The ideal traditional student who is supported financially and culturally to study full-time, who is eager to learn, is dedicated to their studies, is interested in academic debate, is engaged fully with the university community, is self-motivated and takes responsibility for their learning and whose goal is to achieve at the highest level possible is mostly a student of the past. The modern student has to work to support themselves and to support the lifestyle they have chosen. Full-time students are often working part-time; many students are working full-time while studying part-time. Some attempt full-time study while continuing to work full-time. The goal of their studies is to achieve

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