Blended Learning - Lessons from Five Universities

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Overview

• Experiences in blended learning and lessons learnt from 5 universities (Curtin, Deakin, UNSW, HKU, OUUK)

• Developing effective and sustainable blended learning courses and exploring their longer term impact

• Lessons learnt and the need for learning design to improve experiences for our students
Experiences and Lessons Learnt
1988 - 2016

- Curriculum design/teaching/research
- Designing for distance & reusing to take the place of on-campus course components (modular delivery)
- Considerations: sustainability, transferability – requiring institutional capacity & staff and students capability building, CoPs, adjusting & (re)building
- Technology – stimulus to try out new practices; Technology combined with blended learning – a ‘Trojan Horse for change’
Case Study One: Civil Engineering

Core & service course 120-250 students – 1988

- PSI – self-paced instruction (Keller Plan, 1968)
- Problem/activity-led printed study guides ‘well suited to STEM subjects’ (Maciea & Usher, 2012) on-campus students ‘buy-at-cost’ guides from bookshop
- ‘Lectures’ – became small group & individual tutorials
- Advanced students – complete activities early in own time, then focus on other courses

Lessons learnt

- Great success but ‘the tragedy of the early adopter’
- Whole school ‘buy-in’ essential & impact of ‘ownership’
- Later the WASM buy-in cascade case (Fox, 2015)
Case Study Two: Microbiology

Practising nurses in rural/regional Western Australia – upgrade diploma to degree – 1988-91

• weekly videos - lab equipment/experiments, demos/illustrated narration broadcast on GWNTV
• activity-led print-based study guides, weekly tasks, readings and resources

‘The Blended Flip’

• Course taught to 750 students on-campus
• Trialled offerings – resources in library
• Flip conventional f-2-f + roll out into other courses

Lessons learnt: ‘the buy-in’ at school & faculty level

(Fox & Edwards, 1990; Edwards, Fox, & Phillips, 1997)
Case Study Three: Sociology

1990s – downward trend in student numbers across all programs in School of Sociology (UG, PG, HDR)

Threat of merger or closure led to review options

Solution:

- Programs review
- Spiral curriculum across all programs
- Distance education methodology for both on- and off-campus students
- Shared resources, shared classes
- Different - 1. tutorials 2. tasks 3. assignments

Lesson learnt: necessity is the mother of invention
Case Study Four: Science Foundation

Late 1990s – 12 years - successful core UG science course. 5000 + students annually. Highly regarded course with large science experiment kit (SEK)

Problem – major expense of SEK & potential role of technology/need to review practices offering course across country borders with H & S issues

Stakeholder discussions – including professional bodies/science institutes

Outcomes:

Major reduction of SEK – towards elimination of kit and use of CD-ROMs and other digital technologies

Lesson learnt: institutional review leading to new solutions
Case Study Five: ITE Program

• MSc (IT in Education) – address government ITE strategy and local needs. Paid taught program: broad demographic - teachers (local, international, mainland), School HoDs, VTC/HE lecturers, gov ED staff, ed publishers, ed web designers, lib & info man all wanting different foci.

Outcome 2000-2012:

• Flexible curriculum to meet agile cohorts 1 yr FT, 2-4 yr PT
• 8 x 3 hrs f-2-f/online classes & 48+hrs out-of-class (group + indiv)
• Simplified curriculum core courses + electives or 4 x ‘specialisms’ – eleadership, elearning, educ design in IT, LIM included in transcript, same assignment brief with WIL & negotiated personalised assignment & peer assessment driving the learning

(Salter, Thomson, Fox & Lam, 2013)
Case Study Six: MOOCs 1

• Opportunity to trial new practices & governance models. e.g. blending levels & frameworks, transferring successful MOOC apps/widgets into institutional LMS to benefit mainstream.

• MOOC stimulus for rethinking models of on-campus L & T e.g. modular nature of MOOC & student choice over when they cover different topics; dealing with 25,000+ students in courses; MOOCs to re-use – flip into class; new understandings of the potential role of MOOCs

• The buy-in: new institutional strategy & impact – in progress

• Planned trial use for MOOCs in accredited courses

Lessons learnt

• Identification of areas requiring change across institution ...
Lessons Learnt: ‘controlled experiments’ for mainstream

• institutional, faculty, individual capacity & capability building
• cultural change – not easy – catalyst to rethink & improve on-campus L&T & improve student learning experiences
• trial new – practices, processes, ways of working: e.g. (pedagogic, governance, micro-credentialing)
• conduct research and evidence changing practices
• identify – what is strategic, sustainable, scalable, transferable – succession/continuity planning

(Fox, 2016)
What do these case studies tell us?

- Blended learning & ‘flipped classes’ here a long time & continue to evolve – taking advantage of research, ubiquitous technologies/increasing staff & student capacities, capabilities & literacies
- Governance strategies – setting up to succeed – university, faculty, school, program then courses
- Institution, faculty, staff need ongoing support/team & capability building OR the Civil Eng case is repeated
- Recognition, rewards, promotion and tenure refined
- Appropriate learning & teaching strategies & technologies to create meaningful & flexible learning experiences and an agreed curriculum framework

So what can we learn from this?
References

- Fox, R. (2015). The rise of open and blended learning. In K.C. Li, & K.S. Yuen (Eds.), *Studies and Practices for Advancement in Open and Distance Education* (pp. 93-103). Hong Kong: Open University of Hong Kong Press.