

Re-conceptualising approaches to academic development in technology-enriched learning environments

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ABSTRACT

Varied approaches to academic staff development that build capacity for adapting to increasingly technology-enabled learning environments are apparent in recent scholarly research. These approaches include communities of practice, action research, boot camps, 'just in time' and generic staff development sessions (De la Harpe, McPherson, & Mason, 2013; Chalmers et al, 2012).

James Cook University, a regional University, is investing in technology-enriched learning spaces that provide access to new, collaborative learning environments to support active learning approaches and blended learning initiatives. In this showcase presentation, an approach to the transitioning of staff to new, technology-enriched learning spaces is presented. In collaboration with organisational units around the University, we have developed an integrated approach to academic development and support for technology-enriched collaborative learning in on-campus and cross-campus learning spaces. The approach draws on ideas from authentic professional learning (Wright, 2011) and includes the use of student IT mentors to build the confidence of staff in using technology in new learning spaces.

A longitudinal research study into transitioning staff (and students) to new technology-enriched learning spaces will contribute to the body of knowledge about changing student support and professional development needs of staff. Research methodology includes data collection through surveys, focus groups and the use of institutional data and documentation. A number of concurrent research projects investigating a variety of aspects of learning spaces and technology at the University are informing an holistic approach to research into learning spaces. These local projects draw on national and international research and professional collaboration.

Keywords: academic development, professional development, learning spaces, learning technology, collaborative learning

Conference sub-theme(s) addressed

Reconceptualising professional development in a globalised world requires an understanding of a common driver. That of increased accountability: in relation to the quality and impact of professional development programs and in demonstrating return for investment in physical spaces and technology (Steel & Andrews, 2012; Chalmers et al 2012). There is abundant research around the use of technology in teaching and learning in the online environment and about the design of learning spaces. However, there is relatively little literature on effective academic development approaches which support the transitioning process when staff and students move into new technology-enriched learning spaces with new opportunities for active learning approaches.

This study contributes to re-conceptualising approaches to research in higher education, moving the scope of academic development beyond traditional 'professional development' for academic staff. Academic research into the effectiveness of technology in contributing to student learning outcomes is being complemented by working with the multiple stakeholders who support the student learning experience through initiatives such as; supported trials of new mobile technology, audio visual equipment and classroom furniture that inform the widespread introduction of new systems; the student Learning Space Mentors who support staff with the use of AV technology in new spaces; and capturing exemplars of good practice in collaborative learning spaces.

The JCU Learning and Teaching Academy Learning Spaces Special Interest Group is bringing together academic and professional staff from across JCU's campuses. Finally, the Learning Spaces Leadership Group provides a central forum for discussion of operational and research-related issues.

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