

Engagement, resilience, and persistence: Facilitating success through integrated curriculum design

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James Cook University's Diploma of Higher Education (DHE) is a one year, open access, enabling program attracting a diverse array of students from across northern Australia and beyond. The open access nature of the DHE results in a diverse student cohort, where 9% of students identify as having a disability, 11% identify as Indigenous, 14% come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and 28% are from non-English speaking backgrounds. Moreover, 68% of students are non-school leavers (aged 19 and above) and 40% did not meet traditional tertiary entry requirements (have an ATAR/OP score) upon commencement of the course. The diverse student cohorts characteristic of enabling spaces result in variable levels of digital and academic literacies in the classroom. This showcase demonstrates how the DHE's core subjects, CU1022: Developing Academic Skills and CS1022: Learning in a Digital Environment, respond to the complexities of concurrently teaching academic and digital literacies in an open access enabling space through an integrated curriculum design. Engagement of horizontal knowledge structures (Paxton & Frith, 2014) within the design processes of CS1022 and CU1022 assure alignment across learning outcomes, assessment processes, and supports. Furthermore, conscious discursive alignment across classroom practice and weekly learning episodes facilitate cohesive learning experiences, fostering a sense of belonging. This positively influences students' motivation, engagement, resilience, and persistence (Tinto, 2009), whilst mitigating the impacts of discontinuities between prior learning and new academic contexts (Paxton & Frith, 2014). Paxton and Firth state (2014) that, "quite often the resources that students bring may not be considered legitimate meaning making tools and ... [therefore] interfere with learning" (p. 173). By emphasising resilience and experiential reflection, in a cross-disciplinary context, CS1022 and CU1022 work collaboratively to moderate, rather than reinforce, the internalisation of a deficit mindset. The success of the collaborative, horizontal design processes in these subjects is evidenced in student feedback: "CS1022 is great and complements CU1022 ... Peer reviewing and working in groups creates a much better student culture" (CS1022, Student Feedback Survey, SP2, 2017), and more broadly in the DHE's sector leading student achievement data.

References

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