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Enabling TEL capacity across complexity

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Abstract

Embedding technology is now a necessary part of higher education teaching and learning policy and practice, owing to cascading effects of technological advancements and the pandemic-driven disruption of traditional teaching and learning modes (Rapanta et al., 2020, 2021). Well-designed technology enhanced learning (TEL) spaces and activities can provide experiences that are authentic, learner-centred, flexible, and equitable (Cochrane et al., 2017; Dunn & Kennedy, 2019).

Despite growing supportive evidence of these benefits, university teaching and learning systems often retain legacy structures and practices where technology-enhanced, creative and flexible activities are not easily integrated or well supported (Bridges et al. 2023). These issues may be exacerbated by the perceived comfort – by both academics and institutions – offered by a ‘snap back’ to pre-pandemic settings (Bryant 2022). As institutions rethink the ways in which they enact TEL (García-Morales et al., 2021; Rapanta et al. 2021), understanding and navigating potential barriers and enablers of innovative TEL design (Bone 2022) becomes important. Within this presentation, I draw and reflect on recent projects to consider how academic development programs might facilitate TEL initiatives that are targeted and sustainable.

For individual academics, approaches to teaching and learning can vary, with flow-on effects into the ways they teach, and the learning outcomes of their students (Trigwell & Prosser, 1997, 2004). In challenging, high-pressure environments, academics who teach may not have the capacity to adapt their approaches to a rapidly changing context (Bone 2021). Indeed, impacts of the pandemic highlight that academic development during times of crisis needs to be more holistic and provide adequate support for innovative change (Bone et al. 2021; Sumer et al., 2021; Mulder et al., 2022; Bone et al. *in review*). Enacting such holistic academic development in higher education institutions, which are highly complex (Knight 2001) but increasingly fragmented and siloed (Becher & Trowler, 2001), requires approaches to design and delivery of programs and supports that mimic and respond to this complexity (Bone & Ross 2019), and are responsive to the intents and priorities of both academics and management, and the learning needs of students.

Embedding technologies into this complex curriculum environment in ways that are sustainable and equitable requires approaches that both build incentives and drivers from leadership (top-down), and reward and harness the existing enthusiasm and capacity of academics (bottom up) (Bone 2022). Building networked approaches to enable curriculum design, development and innovation can involve communities of practice, mentoring or other knowledge-sharing activities across disciplines and roles (Bone et al., 2023). Enacting these across institutional boundaries can bring together those interested in specific aspects of TEL (Narayan et al., *in press*) who may also feel isolated within traditional hierarchical institutional structures (Bone et al., *in press*).

Knowledge sharing and community building has clear potential to drive positive change. As a TEL community, we must continue to advocate for teaching, learning and development spaces that emphasise collaboration and collegial knowledge-sharing, and to push for greater recognition as we work together to build the future of higher education teaching and learning.

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