Developing self-regulated curricula through scaffolded academic skills and literacies through a digital learning environment

Abstract

The students studying in Australian Universities today are very diverse coming from different age groups, language and cultural backgrounds and life experiences (Gunn, Hearne & Sibthorpe, 2011; Parr, 2015). Furthermore, for the substantial number of international students studying in Australia, learning processes in their previous context may have been different. Large class sizes and ever increasing workloads limit university lecturers from individually tutoring this diverse cohort of students. Consequently, there is a need for greater self-regulated learning. It is also worth considering that students seek more than the traditional method of teaching as their learning needs are impacted by the changing nature of the technological world they live in while staff are faced with considerable challenges such as time-tabling issues, class sizes, the increasing diversity and learning needs of students, limited resources and support services. Learning and teaching activities as well as support resources have to acknowledge the diverse student profile, learning needs, disparate levels of preparedness with which students commence in their study programs and other factors that many students but more specifically those in the first year experience when they enrol in their study programs. Digital technologies are able to address most of these identified challenges as they not only allow the systematic development and scaffolding of disciplinary academic and information literacies but also provide students the opportunity to learn on the run, access information anywhere, anytime and when needed (Crook, 2005; Gunn, Hearne, Sibthorpe, 2011; Warshauer, Grant, Del Real & Rousseau, 2004). The careful design, development and embedding of these technology-oriented type resources in courses enable students to experience authentic and experiential learning opportunities, greater control over the progression of their skills development, and the ability to tailor their studies to suit their personal circumstances. This paper discusses a project that sought to take a whole of curriculum approach and leverage the full capabilities of digital learning across a particular Social Work program. The project was undertaken through sequentially integrated iSpring learning modules to scaffold the development of academic and information literacies. Where applicable, continuous assessment tasks were linked to these iSprings to evaluate students' engagement and understanding of the content. Learning analytics were used to assess the efficacy of the approach for the diverse cohorts that comprise the Social Work and Human Services student body. The paper also identifies the development of the digital learning project and the successful collaboration that unfolded between Course Coordinators, the Language and Literacy Coordinator and the Academic Librarian in the division. It is argued that cross disciplinary teaching with digital learning is the key for successful student engagement at university and that the scaffolding of skills and knowledge ought to be undertaken longitudinally across courses so that there is educational development for students (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2012, 'Category 5').

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