Reconnecting relationships through technology

Investigating the use of the Digital Learning Framework (DLF): A case of transition, purpose and validation

Mimi Tsai[1] and Camille Dickson-Dean[2]

[1]Queensland University of Technology, [2]University of Technology Sydney

In recent years the importance of designing learning that integrates both the physical and digital learning environments has increased. Educators often seek approaches that engage students with the thought that the incorporation of learning technologies could enhance students' learning experience (Bruggeman et al., 2021; Dahmash, 2020) In reality, it is challenging to determine how and when learning technology should be used to the benefit of both educators and students. This lack of awareness creates a need for educational institutions to develop support to facilitate capabilities in designing learning through the use of technologies (Rasheed et al., 2020).

Apart from these challenges, educators' understanding of the tenets and affordances of blended learning also varies (Moore et al., 2011). Alammary, Sheard and Carbone (2014) state that it is a challenge for higher education educators to select the design approach for blended learning that is most suited to their needs. Additionally, Cronje (2020) suggests optimising learning by reconceptualising blended learning from a pedagogical perspective with a mix of theories, methods and technologies may be a better way forward. In transitioning to online and blended learning, Queensland University of Technology (QUT) developed a Digital Learning Framework (DLF) to support the learning design process. This framework is designed to provide QUT learning and teaching community with design principles and practical quality guidelines to support the design of digital learning. This thus is an attempt to solve the challenges outlined about educators knowledge, skills and abilities in the blended learning space (Alammary et al., 2014; Cronje, 2020; Dahmash, 2020; Moore et al., 2011). Whilst this purpose of the framework is in place it is still unclear whether the DLF is used as proposed. Therefore this research investigated "What are user's experiences of applying the DLF in their own design and delivery context? To do this fourteen QUT learning designers were interviewed and their experiences thematically analysed against the DLF framework to create design cases (Boling & Smith, 2009). The cases captured the complexity of the context and the decisions associated within this space.

As part of outlining the complexity, the cases were categorised from the designer's positionality towards the use of the DLF. Based on the use of the DLF three categories of users were identified thus presenting a way to interpret the framework as a foundational guide for QUT:

1. Translators apply DLF to facilitate their learning design works in all the suitable contexts. Designers may design DLF into workshop style and actively promote DLF in their practice.
2. Embedders are aware and seemingly understand DLF. They actively look for resources that support their work and use external resources to enhance their current practice. The DLF methodology is embedded into their epistemological framework of activities hence the name "Embedders".
3. Onlookers do not participate in the use or promotion of DLF as they challenge and criticise the usability and relevancy of the current version of DLF. They are aware of DLF; however, in reality, their learning design are not guided by DLF. They neither see the need to advocate for the framework, nor they believe DLF facilitate their work.

Discussions show how users travel from each of these roles based on the context and associated factors with considerations on how these roles influence how the DLF is used and whether its purpose is solidified through its position as a foundational guide for QUT.

Keywords: learning design, framework, blended learning, learning experience, use

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