

Chapter 4.2

Personalised Learning: A Case Study in Teaching Clinical Educators Instructional Design Skills

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ABSTRACT

The authors consider personalised learning in the context of delivering a specialist postgraduate course – ClinEd 711, ELearning and Clinical Education – at the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland. They describe the pedagogical theory underlying the course design and their experience of delivering ClinEd 711 with particular reference to the personalised learning process that the course design facilitated. They present their research results for the student experience of ClinEd 711 and discuss changes made to the course as a result of student feedback. They make reference to the introduction of student-led modules to further personalise the students' learning experience. ClinEd 711 is a specialist postgraduate course with low student

numbers; with this in mind the authors discuss the implications of their pedagogical approach for those educators involved in teaching larger classes. They conclude their paper with a discussion of the role of the educator in personalised learning.

INTRODUCTION

The Learning Technology Unit (<http://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/faculty/ltu/>) and the Centre for Medical & Health Sciences Education (<http://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/faculty/cmhse/default.aspx>) at the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland jointly offer a fifteen week course – ELearning and Clinical Education (ClinEd 711) – as part of a clinical education postgraduate degree program. The overall objective of ClinEd 711 is to bring the learners – who are typically educators in the field of medical and

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health sciences – to the point of understanding themselves as instructional designers capable of converting one of their traditional face-to-face courses for flexible/distance delivery. ClinEd 711 was offered for the first time in Semester 1, 2007 as a fully online distance education course. The course was offered for a second time in Semester 1, 2008 and at the time of writing (March 2009) the course is being offered for a third time. From the outset, ClinEd 711 was designed to locate the student at the centre of the learning process in order to provide students with a personalised learning experience. However, as a result of feedback from students and after critical analysis of the first iteration of the course, ClinEd 711 was re-designed to create an even more personalised learning environment. This was achieved through the introduction of student-led modules in which the students had to take responsibility for the creation and delivery of a particular course module to be “studied” by their peers.

In this chapter we: outline our understanding of personalised learning; detail the research approach that we took in designing and evaluating ClinEd 711; explain how the course was designed to situate the learner at the centre of the learning process; describe the personalised learning processes that the approach facilitated; outline the differences between the first and second iteration of the course; and provide the reasoning behind the changes that were made for the second iteration of the course. Our chapter will make particular reference to the student-led modules that were introduced in the second iteration of the course, as the rationale for this innovation was to provide students with greater learning autonomy and with greater responsibility for their learning outcomes. As we shall see, these are two of the central features of personalised learning. We are aware that ClinED 711 is a specialist postgraduate course with a relatively low number of student enrolments and with this fact in mind we will discuss the potential challenges of offering this particular form of personalised learning to larger class

sizes. We conclude our chapter by discussing the relationship between the role of the educator and the independence of the student in a personalised learning environment before briefly considering future research directions.

PERSONALISED LEARNING

A key characteristic of personalised learning is that the student is located at the centre of the learning process. Personalised learning meets the individual learning needs of a diverse range of students whilst encouraging independent learning (Johnson, 2004) through learners taking greater responsibility for their own learning and through learners being more actively engaged in the learning process (Hannafin & Land, 1997; Ong & Hawryszkiewicz, 2003). It is the design of a particular type of learning environment “shaped by its foundations and assumptions about learning, pedagogy and the learner” that provides the conditions for personalised learning (Hannafin & Land, 1997, p. 197). For example, teachers can facilitate personalised learning by adopting teaching strategies that meet the needs, abilities and aptitudes of each student thereby providing for an individual learning pathway (Sun & Williams, 2004). This can be achieved through shifting responsibility from the teacher to the student for discovering, organising, analysing and synthesising content (Brush & Saye, 2000; Downes, 2005). Such strategies can maximise student motivation and attainment so that students realise their full potential (Johnson, 2004). However, the role of the educator remains crucial if students are to succeed (Hannafin & Land, 1997) with the educator fulfilling the necessary roles of facilitator and mentor (Johnson, 2004; McLoughlin & Lee, 2007; Ong & Hawryszkiewicz, 2003).

In cases where class sizes are large with lecturers often being “time-poor” (Goodyear, 2005, p. 2), it has been said that personalised learning must necessarily be about offering students learn-

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