

Chapter 13

Implementing Emerging Technologies to Support Work–Integrated Learning in Allied Health Education: The Journey From Exploration to Adoption

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ABSTRACT

The adoption and implementation of new technology to support work-integrated learning (WIL) is often challenging for staff and students. In this chapter, the authors discuss the processes and decisions involved from early piloting to potential institutional adoption of relevant technology (emerging or otherwise) and provide practical tools for the readers' use. The discussion is supported by evidence from allied health programs at a large higher education institution in Australia and identifies issues, controversies, and problems involved in new technology adoption. The importance of clarifying the pedagogical need before looking to technology is reinforced. Guidelines for identifying emerging and/or innovative use of current technologies are described, followed by discussion of considerations for selection of technologies that best align with the educational requirement.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3850-9.ch013

INTRODUCTION

Educators today are well aware of the constant evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and how this continually confronts their pedagogical practice. Possible challenges include: re-examination of old practices; pressure from others; evaluating innovative ideas for activities previously not possible; and ever-changing institutional processes to grapple with. The challenges are exciting, but sometimes seem bewildering and even over-whelming, particularly for those who are new to the field.

In this chapter, the place of ICTs in Work Integrated Learning is described, particularly in the context of Allied Health education. This discussion is a map to assist educators and professional support staff in understanding current practices; provide ideas for staying abreast of technological change; and list considerations for effectively selecting, implementing, and further disseminating emerging technologies in their organisation.

It is not a static picture - it is more of a journey to be navigated. The authors contend that this journey should be undertaken with a considered approach which strikes a balance between the speed needed due to the rapid pace of technological change and the caution which is warranted for significant educational investment. Knee-jerk adoption of easily accessible technologies and 'paralysis by analysis' are two extremes to be avoided.

It should be noted that much of the following discussion also applies to the use of ICTs in education more broadly, and to the practice of Work Integrated Learning in other disciplines besides Allied Health. The chapter aims to assist academics in understanding the wider ramifications of technology adoption to minimise risk while maximising innovation.

BACKGROUND

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is defined by Patrick et al. (2008, p. iv) as "a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum". WIL provides real world practice on or off campus to improve student employability, understanding of workplace culture, engagement, and retention (Patrick et al., 2008). Similar terms include cooperative education, professional learning, real world learning, and social engagement with the community (Patrick et al., 2008).

Allied Health includes health programs other than medicine and nursing eligible for professional body registration (Campbell, McAllister, & Eley, 2012) who aim to achieve optimal function in their clients (Lowe, Adams, & O'Kane, 2007).

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