Applications of networked learning to the support of learning and teaching in higher education

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Introduction

This symposium is the result of a broad effort by the authors to consider the applicability of networked learning to our work to support learning and teaching across our institution. We, the authors, work in a central learning and teaching support unit within Auckland University of Technology (AUT), in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand. We are concerned with how networked learning is applicable to our efforts to support learning and teaching at AUT-specifically- to operationalise the institution's strategic commitments to learner success. Our focus on supporting learning and teaching operates at various levels, from the 'local' level of individual courses to the intermediate level of supporting degree programmes to the more 'global' level associated with developing institutional policy that supports effective academic teaching practices and the ongoing evolution of a technology infrastructure that enables and supports productive learning and teaching activity. Moreover, our work deals with questions and challenges which range from specific, situated practical challenges to broad, philosophical questions which affect learning and teaching across the institution. This symposium represents our efforts to synthesise our understandings of networked learning and connect general ideas about networked learning with specific, situated aspects of our work to support learning and teaching across the institution.

Early in our discussions, we identified the underlying assumption that networked learning is seen as a 'good thing' and the associated idea that engaging educators at AUT in networked learning was presumed to be worthwhile for reasons highlighted in the growing body of literature related to networked learning, including:

- Valuing certain types of collaboration that are present in the real world, but sometimes not present in university learning and teaching
- Promoting learner engagement
- Recognising learners' values and explicitly creating opportunity to engage in valued activity
- Promoting a variety of non-cognitive learning, sometimes labelled 'soft skills' or similar
- Valuing reflection
- Increasing students' efficacy

However, we recognise the need to be critical about the proposition that networked learning is an inherently valuable idea and so the questions that inform our ongoing work include attention to the 'why' and 'how' of networked learning at AUT.

The papers in this symposium identify 4 specific cases, questions or challenges which are representative of our efforts to a) understand networked learning in the context of AUT and b) apply it to our ongoing work to support learning and teaching at AUT.

In the first paper, Paper 1 Author seek to apply key ideas from networked learning to the practices of educational design at the course level and how to implement this as an institution. The objective of this paper is to propose an institutional approach to design for networked learning at the course level. The implementation approach should be systematic not uniform. A tiered approach to implementing design for networked learning at a course level is proposed, along with future work needed for the implementation across our institution.

In the second paper, Paper 2 Author examine a specific case of learning design in a single course in health science. The case study explores how the course design reflects eight principles of design for networked learning and proposes some recommendations on design for networked learning at a course level. It links practice and theories and illustrates how networked learning is unpacked in the context of the course design.

In the third paper, Paper 3 Author explore how networked learning informs a view of learner control over networked learning. This paper focuses specifically on designing the student experience on an institutional (policy) level in the context of a higher education institution in Aotearoa New Zealand and how a networked learning framework can inform that.

In the fourth paper, Paper 4 Author frame a proposed case study which aims at exploring to what extent Networked Learning enhances classroom experiences at the authors' institution and how the authors' institution could adopt networked learning in producing Great Graduates, the authors' institutional mission.

Both individually and as a symposium, these papers are intended to stimulate discussion about the application of networked learning in specific contexts and further the ongoing work to refine thinking about what networked learning is and how it is useful to higher education.