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Teaching and learning with technology as enabler: A case study on flexible learning for postgraduate nurses

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Nursing

The University of Auckland, 2007

Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the practice of flexible learning for postgraduate nurses. Flexible learning is a contemporary approach to learning that utilises the benefits of technology. Flexible learning can be understood as a continuum, from fully on-line or web-based courses, to those that are on-campus and supported by technology. Internationally, the rise of flexible learning has been influenced by increased demand for higher education and competition among providers within the context of reduced education funding. The study population, New Zealand postgraduate nurses are accessing higher education in increasing numbers to advance their practice and to position themselves for new roles and opportunities. These are often experienced nurses yet inexperienced in higher university education, who combine study, work and other commitments.

The study employed a qualitative case study design because it enabled multiple perspectives to be gained. Data included documentation, participant observation, survey, students' assessed work and interviews with key stakeholders: student, teacher and the organisation. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously as an iterative process. Thematic analysis was conducted on reviewed documentation, participant observation and interviews. The survey was analysed using descriptive statistical analysis techniques. Finally, a rubric was constructed as a matrix for analysing assessed work.

The study identifies the elements that contribute to flexible learning and the interconnectedness between the elements within the dynamic context of a university to illustrate that effective flexible learning can be provided by using a student centred approach to ensure the learning needs of postgraduate nurses are met. Flexible learning was found to improve access, choice, and provide an emphasis on the student as central to learning. In response to these findings the weighting of recommendations are toward the organisation as it is at this level where greater change can be made to improve support for flexible learning provision.

Acknowledgments

Firstly I would like to thank my supervisors, Nicola North and Cathy Gunn for the guidance provided throughout my PhD. I must not forget those with whom I have been working within the School of Nursing and the University. I thank them for their encouragement; it has been appreciated. My supervisors and colleagues have both supported and inspired me through their passion for nursing and education.

Some of these people, along with a number of postgraduate nursing students were participants in this research and certainly this study would not have happened without the generous sharing of their time and perspectives.

I also would like to thank the members of my wider professional and personal communities. There are many people, who in ways big and small, have contributed to my journey of learning and development.

Last but not least, I would like to thank those who really made it possible for me to complete my Ph.D. because of their encouragement and emotional support; my friends and family.

This work is dedicated to the men in my life. To my father who saw this start, but sadly died before its completion; and my husband Craig, and sons, Grant and Brent, who continually sustain and ground me.

My love and gratitude to all of you.

Ephesians 3-20: God's power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine.

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