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Why do we teach the way we do?

The relationship between tutors' conceptions of teaching and learning, the design/teaching of their online courses and effective online teaching principles.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for degree of

Master of Education

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New Zealand**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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Abstract

There is an increase in the use of e-learning within tertiary institutions and many courses are moving to online learning as the means to deliver all or part of courses that were previously delivered face-to-face. Online delivery, primarily through the internet, provides new challenges for tutors in delivering courses that demonstrate effective teaching principles. This study researched the perspectives and practice of twelve tutors from three different New Zealand polytechnics via a multiple case study. It investigated how tutors' conceptions of teaching and learning aligned with the design and teaching of their online courses, and with effective online teaching principles. Enablers and barriers to tutors using effective online teaching principles were also examined. Interaction between students, between tutor and student and between tutor and content were all found to be important conceptions of teaching and learning shared by the participants. It appeared that an understanding of learning theory was related to tutors' conceptions of teaching and learning aligning with the design of their courses. In addition, this understanding influenced tutors' use of effective online teaching principles. The research identified that all tutors' courses aligned with the effective online teaching principles of constructive alignment, the chunking of content and tasks into appropriate sizes, and scaffolding of information. The principles related to student interactivity with content, between students and with the tutor were evidenced on two of the polytechnics' courses with limited evidence on the third polytechnics' site. The effective online teaching principles of promoting student ownership of the learning process, and interaction with a larger learning environment was demonstrated on few of the tutors' online courses in this study. The enablers and barriers experienced by tutors played a key role in the extent to which tutors implemented effective online teaching principles in their courses. Institutional processes related to course design, and tutor professional learning and support played a critical role in providing tutors with the knowledge and time they needed to effectively teach online.

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