A TEACHER’S RESEARCH JOURNEY INTO E-LEARNING:
ALIGNING TECHNOLOGY, PEDAGOGY AND CONTEXT

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents my own work except where due acknowledgement is made and that this material has not been included in a thesis or report submitted to Massey University or any other university for a degree or other qualification.

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ABSTRACT

e-Learning has the potential to radically change the way we teach and learn in higher education, but there is ongoing debate as to what constitutes effective e-learning environments. This study explores the interrelated areas of e-learning technology and pedagogy within the context of a postgraduate special education and educational psychology programme. The study is framed in a scholarship of teaching and learning approach and covers three successive phases of overlapping activities of teaching, learning and research.

The first phase of the research focuses on the design of a community of practice approach to e-learning. The aim is to enable students to develop their identity as members of the professional community by bridging the gap between university-based learning and its real-world application. In the second phase of the research, alternative technology is used to investigate a better alignment of e-learning technology and pedagogy. The findings here show that a community of practice pedagogy is better aligned with a social constructionist e-learning technology. In the third phase of the research an e-learning alignment guide is developed to analyse the changes in e-learning in relation to the interrelated areas of technology, pedagogy and context. The guide is applied to the e-learning case studies in Phases 1 and 2 of this study. The profiles of alignment from these case studies illustrate the complexities and tensions in e-learning and the potential of linking advanced technologies with effective teaching practices to change the way we teach and learn.

The key finding of this study is that careful alignment of technology, pedagogy and context is needed to actualise the potential of e-learning in higher education. The e-learning alignment guide developed in this study enables analysis of e-learning environments to provide alignment profiles. Aligning innovative technologies with appropriate pedagogies in different contexts is essential for e-learning to meet the needs of learners in the digital age. The enormous and rapid development of new educational technologies has seriously challenged traditional forms of pedagogy. This study shows that both a scholarship of teaching and learning approach and the use of the e-learning alignment guide can make a positive contribution to designing effective e-learning environments.
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