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Using an online Learning Management System to personalise learning for primary students.

A descriptive multiple case study

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master

of

Education

at Massey University, Manawatū,

New Zealand.

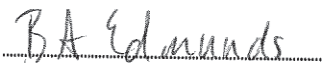
Bronwyn Edmunds

2013

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.

Signature: 

Date: 12th December 2013

Abstract

Personalising learning, digital technologies and Learning Management Systems are 'hot topics' in education in 2013. Learning Management Systems, hereafter referred to as an LMS, can personalise learning by encouraging teaching approaches that hold the student at the centre of the learning process (Seiler, as cited in Interface Magazine, 2009). However, there is little accessible research about how the LMS has been utilised in schools (Watson & Watson, 2007), especially primary schools, with some educators questioning the role that the LMS has to play in today's schools (Downes, 2005; McLoughlin & Lee, 2008).

This descriptive multiple-case study set out to explore the role of an LMS in personalising learning for students from the perspective of three primary school teachers. The intention was to provide insight into the role an LMS could play in classrooms when personalising learning. However, it became more about exploring the components of personalising learning and how this transferred into the LMS. The research project involved gathering multiple sources of data from interviews, observations and documentary information from the LMS.

The findings from this research suggest that an LMS has the potential to be a key part of a primary classroom environment which is built on the components of personalising learning. The degree to which personalising learning occurs is dependent on the teacher's overriding pedagogy, knowledge and understanding of personalising learning, school constraints and the perceived capacity of students to be independent learners. For the teachers in this project, personalising learning involved: (a) learning built around assessment for learning pedagogy, (b) a highly-structured approach to learning and teaching that places the needs and interests of students at the centre of learning, (c) learners informed and empowered through student choice and student voice, (d) a core curriculum of literacy and maths and (e) KnowledgeNET (the LMS at the centre of this study) as a tool to support learning. The findings highlight the interconnected nature of personalising learning pedagogy, an LMS and classroom practice.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AFL	Assessment for Learning
BECTA	British Educational Communications and Technology Agency
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (UK)
ERO	Education Review Office
ICT	Information Communication and Technology
IWB	Interactive Whiteboards
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
LMS	Learning Management System
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MLE	Managed Learning Environment
NSCL	National College of School Leadership
NZQA	New Zealand Qualification Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
SMS	Student Management System
VICCSO	Victorian Council of State School Organisations

Glossary

21st Century pedagogy or future-orientated teaching and learning	The changing nature of education in light of the needs of students in today's world. Often described in terms of features or characteristics of what teaching and learning should encompass (Bolstad, et al., 2012).
Assessment for Learning	Teaching and learning process based around interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there (Assessment Reform Group, 2002).
Decile Rating	A school's decile rating indicates the extent to which it draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.
e-learning	Learning and teaching that is supported by or facilitated through the effective use of information and communication technologies (Ministry of Education, 2013a).
Feedback	Gaining information on performance or understanding.
Feed-forward	Gaining information to inform next steps.
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	Any electronic or digital device used to access information or to communicate with others (Ministry of Education, 2013a).
Interactive Whiteboard (IWB)	A large interactive display that connects to a computer.
Learning Management System (LMS)	A component of an MLE. A secure online space of software tools and digital online content that controls much of the curriculum and pedagogical aspects of online learning within an MLE (Ministry of Education, 2012b).

Managed Learning Environments (MLE)	A collection of software tools and digital content that supports learning. It is made up of a Learning Management System and a Student Management System. (Ministry of Education, 2012b).
Modelling Book	Linked to teacher modelling. As they do the 'showing how', teachers often record the ideas and strategies in big books as a class resource of modelling activities, for children and teachers to revisit.
Pedagogy	The art and science of how something is taught and students learn it.
Personalising Learning	"High expectations of every child, given practical form by high quality teaching based on a sound knowledge and understanding of each child's needs" (Milibrand, 2004, p. 8).
Student Choice	Choice in the mix of ways in which student needs might be met (Leadbeater, 2004b).
Student Management System (SMS)	A component of an MLE. Controls the administration and management of student and staff information (Ministry of Education, 2012b).
Student Voice	Listening to and acting upon what students say (Hargreaves, 2006).
Te Marautanga o Aotearoa	Curriculum document for kura Māori-language immersion schools and Māori-medium schools. It is in te reo Māori (the Māori language) and stands alongside the national school curriculum.
Ultra Fast Broadband (UFB)	Internet services which deliver access speeds, in excess of 25 Mbps (Crown Fibre Holdings Limited, 2013).
Web 2.0	Term describing a second generation of the World Wide Web, that enables sharing, communication and information discovery (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008).