

Virtual Learning Spaces: Getting Them Right for Students

Natasha Reedy

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia
Natasha.Reedy@usq.edu.au

Terry Clark

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia
Terry.Clark@usq.edu.au

Vicki-Ellen Horner

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia
Vicki-Ellen.Horner@usq.edu.au

Pat Lehane

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia
Pat.Lehane@usq.edu.au

Jayln Rose

University of Southern Queensland, Hervey Bay, Australia
Jayln.Rose@usq.edu.au

Lecturers encounter challenges in providing engaging virtual learning spaces (VLS) that minimise extraneous cognitive load. Although a number of theories and models promote effective digital pedagogy, there is little research on how design of VLS's contributes to the extraneous cognitive load impacting on students' ability to focus on the intrinsic content and germane learning activities. This action research investigates first year nursing students' experience of online learning and their effort to navigate the human-computer interface. Action research was chosen to monitor, inform and adjust the VLS of a new course using three consecutive online surveys. Results provided baseline demographic data on the respondents' initial experience with VLS's and their recommendations for changes to improve the student VLS experience. Findings indicate a strong desire for consistent VLS screen design and structured information architecture for ease of navigation. Respondents preferred consistent VLS screen design and structured navigation schema for the explicit and considered placement of course learning material, social learning tools and associated activities.