

Student engagement in a blended environment

Lynn Jeffrey

Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand

l.m.jeffrey@massey.ac.nz

John Milne

Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

J.D.Milne@massey.ac.nz

The adoption of blended learning has emerged as a major trend in technology-enabled higher education. Blended approaches are thought to offer opportunities for additional learning time and instructional elements not present in traditional face-to-face conditions. The type of media used appears to have only a small impact on effectiveness, particularly in studies comparing very similar learning situations. Rather, it is the type strategies used to engage students in the dual context that is the key to effective learning. The challenge is to support teachers to implement principles of good practice in a blended situation. This paper reports a study that developed a framework of student engagement strategies from the literature then tested these in a blended learning environment. Ten key engagement strategies were identified, each of which related to a particular time frame for: capturing engagement; maintaining engagement; and, re-engaging those who have either never engaged or have become disengaged. These strategies were tested with nine classes (n=541) from two large universities using a mixed methods approach. The results indicated that the ten strategies improved student engagement levels; teachers played a critical role as gatekeepers to the student learning experience; students create their own blend of behaviours and activities that have personal relevance and efficacy for them; and, disengaged students can be retrieved.