Technology-enhanced learning in HE at Digifest 2017

You're listening to the Jisc podcast. What evidence is it that is most useful to enable both individual lecturers, teachers, practitioners and those who are setting strategy to make the right decisions in that area? A few weeks ago at Digifest we chatted to our head of higher education and student experience, Sarah Davies, about technology enhanced learning in HE.

A lot of ways that technology enhances learning in teaching is by enabling greater time or greater effort on the types of learning that we know best promote students to really master their subject. We're thinking more active learning, more active engagement, students going out and researching topics because the amount of digital content out there, digital primary source material that just was completely inaccessible 20 years ago is amazing to enable students to really create absolutely new research for themselves. There's also things like use of formative assessment to really help both students, and their lecturers to monitor how they're progressing through their studies and take action if they need to, to promote more progress. It enables collaborative work, on-line interactions between students, which might not be everybody's first choice but some students don't feel comfortable contributing in front of a large classroom of people and much prefer making their contribution when
they have time to think about it and can write it instead of speak it. There's also an argument that it really increases the amount of publicly relevant, publically accessible work the students can do while they're still studying, but then stands them in really great stead for employment.

First of all, if we consider some of these technologies it would be an institutional level choice to implement, something like 'lecture capture' is the one that springs to mind here, which really does tend to be very popular with students. They like to know that the lecture is available after the event, often they will still choose to go to the lecture, but particularly for students who may be struggling with the content, students whose first language isn't English, or just students who like to review things in that way at exam time it tends to work really well.

Other things that we know are popular with students are support for on-line submission for assignments and on-line receptor feedback, or although it's easy to do something that's much less popular with students by also insisting that those assignments are printed out and handed in, which some places are still doing. Other things that are obviously popular with students, but that institutions may not want to bring into official practice, are things like use of social media, although aspects of that desire to connect with people like you on-line can infuse throughout a course and its overall approach even though it may not be using some of the standard tools that students would necessarily have in their pocket.

We've seen this over the last few years when we were doing strategic visits with universities with the universities for the change in their learning landscapes projects about five years ago we found that there was less planning to really evaluate how they have worked for students than you might think and now we're looking at that across the sector really and saying, what evidence do we have of how these things, what evidence is it that is most useful to enable both individual lecturers, teachers, practitioners and those who are setting strategy to make the right decisions in that area.

I think one of the ways that introducing technology into higher education, it has made a big difference it's almost the less glamourous side of things I think, it is this thing about interactional expectations so we know that students have high expectations of how the administrative business of the university will be carried out on line generated from the kind of interactions they have with on-line businesses. Things like having a personalised timetable available to them, having that time to have the timetable updated or having alerts when lecturers are sick, when rooms change, when other things change. Being alerted of upcoming assessments also building on that a bit more, using that kind of data driven view of the curriculum to make sure that assignment bunching is limited so that students aren't being asked to complete a bunch of assignments all at the same time.

I think all that kind of thing of shaping and easing a student’s interaction with their own personal course of studies and to make sure they have an easy way of making sure they know what they’re meant to be doing at each time, I think that can make quite a big different, quite apart from the real uses of technology to support learning.

If you're asking me whether across the board technology has already made a significant improvement in teaching, in say higher education, I'd probably have to say no, it hasn't changed the way everyone works. Sometimes that's because individual lecturers are so engaged and so engaging, so strong pedagogically face to face that maybe they don't need to use technology. But what I can say is that I have seen so many really exciting pedagogically relevant, well-structured uses of technology by teachers who really care about their subjects,
about supporting their students and about how to take it forward, so I think yes it’s certainly when used well, it is improving teaching and we know that over 70% of the students we surveyed last summer said that yes, the use of technology by teachers did improve learning and teaching and we’re actually probing that in quite a lot more detail this year, asking students more detailed questions about well how do you feel, do you feel empowered, do you get distracted, all these kind of things to really understand that a bit more closely.

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