Post Publication Review

Pye, G., Holt, D., Salzman, S., Bellucci, E. & Lombardi, L. (2015). Engaging diverse student audiences in contemporary blended learning environments in Australian higher business education: Implications for Design and Practice. *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, 19, Research Article. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.3127/ajis.v19i0.1251

Review

The above paper by Pye et al 2015, provides an interesting insight into student engagement in a blended learning environment across both the face-to-face and online education realms through presenting findings from a student engagement survey. In the initial parts of the paper Pye et al report on the engagement of undergraduate students in an introductory subject in the faculty of business at their university. Discussion was made with regard to the student academic success, satisfaction and retention rates in relation to contemporary online blended learning management system (LMS) environment at their own university. The survey appears to cover this engagement from an online perspective only, given the six key dimensions listed in the paper, which would be useful for future research in this area. From these dimensions, findings are presented across a number of different themes focusing on the student perceptions and finally several valuable areas for blended learning design and practice are provided.

Effective engagement of students in their own learning is a goal sought by many academics. Active learning is a key element in engaging students. Through participation in activities which maximize learning, students not only grasp the learning outcomes, but also understanding the underlying context on which the activity was based (Maznevski 1996). Through this process, learning then becomes an experience and provides students with the knowledge to perform effectively, as recently demonstrated in a similar course at another university (Gallagher & Sixsmith 2014a and 2014b). These studies build on a tradition of student engagement in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) (Al-Saggaf & Burmeister, 2012; Burmeister, 1995; Simpson, Nevile, & Burmeister, 2003), which demonstrate that it is this active learning experience that has a profound influence on learning outcomes.

The authors provide background to the study, through discussion on: 1) the blended learning environment at their university; 2) the emergence of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses); and 3) the online education model (which appears to be the new '*distance model of education*'). Each of the above has emerged in its own way from the extended use of ICT in the education sector. A major focus in the background (and the overall study) is the concept of '*CloudDeakin*', which appears to be the LMS. An important facet of this current study is the focus on the student and their perceptions of engagement in the online and blended learning environments. Background literature is presented in this area to justify this direction of the study.

The survey instrument demonstrates a predominant focus toward the online environment. While the key characteristics of blended learning environments are presented in the background information (Table 1), this appears to be lacking when the authors describe the survey instrument (Sections 3.2 and 3.3). In fact, the survey is framed around six key dimensions each of which use '*Online*' rather than '*Blended*'. The survey in our opinion lacks one key dimension, that of the actual subject content. While students can collaborate and interact using ICT, it is the subject content that they truly need to engage with. An example of blended learning is that of scenario based interaction between the online content and teacher led instruction to the student (Gallagher & Sixsmith 2014a and 2014b).

One limitation of this study is the discussion about Blended Learning. The distinction between on campus and off campus students seems at conjecture with a blended learning environment, as this environment is a combination of face to face and eLearning. This doesn't seem to reflect the blended learning ideology, as the authors quite frankly state that they were focusing from a student and not the teaching staff perspective. The discussion is further blurred when in Section 2.1 where the authors bring into the review the issue of mature age distance education,

making claims that are not well supported. If they wished to explore this topic in more depth, AJIS recently published articles on the undergraduate to post-graduate distinctions for IS students (Richards & Marrone, 2014), and on post-graduate work specifically Burmeister (2015). That latter article addresses another issue raised by these authors, that of online learning communities, which it addresses in terms of communities of practice.

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Author Response

The authors of the paper under review value the positive contributions made and thank their colleagues for their contribution.