

RECALIBRATING INSTITUTIONAL CHOREOGRAPHIES FOR FUTURE-FOCUSED LEARNING AND TEACHING

*Som Naidu**

(Technology, Education and Design Associates)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7480-8120>

*Javed Yusuf***

(Fiji Higher Education Commission)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1209-4190>

*Dhiraj Bhartu****

(Technology Education Design Experiences)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2214-1114>

*Deepak Bhartu*****

(The University of the South Pacific)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5625-5801>

ABSTRACT

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions worldwide have had to immediately pivot to online distance learning and teaching. While institutions with a grounding in open, distance and flexible learning have done reasonably well in the circumstances, the majority of institutions have struggled with this sudden move away from their conventional campus-based operations. Examples of the few successful adoption and implementation of online learning and teaching are however, boutique and small-scale operations in one program of study, one Department or Faculty. Clearly missing from this scenario are examples of large scale and institution-wide adoption of open, online, distance and flexible learning. This is a consequence of the limitations of existing operational infrastructure as well as mindsets. These are hard to change

* PhD Educational Technology (Montreal, Quebec, Canada). Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK). Doctor Honoris Causa at the Open University of Sri Lanka. Former Pro Vice-Chancellor (Flexible Learning) and Director of the Centre for Flexible Learning at The University of the South Pacific. Principal Associate of Technology, Education and Design Associates. Executive Editor of the Journal Distance Education. Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. E-mail: [sommnaidu@gmail.com](mailto:somnnaidu@gmail.com)

** Masters in Educational Technology and Computer science (University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia. Former Head of Learning Experience Design and Development at The University of the South Pacific. Senior Manager Operations and Quality Assurance at Fiji Higher Education Commission. Suva, Fiji Islands. E-mail: javedyjf@gmail.com

*** Masters in Computing Science and Information Systems (The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji Islands). Former Head of Learning Technologies & Analytics at the Centre for Flexible Learning. He holds a Master's degree in Computing Science and Information Systems and has previously held senior positions within the University including Acting Director, CFL. Executive Committee Member at Australasian Council for Online and Distance Education (ACODE). Suva, Fiji Islands. E-mail: dhiraj.bhartu@gmail.com

**** Master of Arts (Education), Master of Computing and Information Systems, and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TVET) (The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji Islands). The author has been leading and managing initiatives in Open Education (OE) including the development and integration of Open Educational Resources (OER) in courses at The University of South Pacific. Suva, Fiji Islands. E-mail: deepak.bhartu@gmail.com

in the best of times, although for long-term benefit and resilience against future disturbances of the sorts we are currently experiencing, they must change. This kind of change requires institution-wide reimagination and reengineering of conventional practices. This paper presents a case study of an institution-wide recalibration of learning and teaching choreographies at one University.

Keywords: Open, distance and flexible learning; Reimagination and reengineering educational practices; Recalibration of learning and teaching choreographies post COVID-19

RESUMO

RECALIBRANDO COREOGRAFIAS INSTITUCIONAIS PARA APRENDIZAGEM E ENSINO FUTURO

Na esteira da pandemia COVID-19, as instituições educacionais em todo o mundo tiveram que mudar imediatamente para o ensino e aprendizagem a distância *online*. Embora as instituições com base no aprendizado aberto, a distância e flexível tenham se saído razoavelmente bem nessas circunstâncias, a maioria das instituições tem lutado com esse súbito afastamento de suas operações convencionais baseadas no *campus*. Os poucos exemplos de experiências de adoção e implementação bem-sucedidas de ensino e aprendizagem *online* são, no entanto, operações boutique e de pequena escala em um programa de estudo, um departamento ou faculdade. Claramente ausentes neste cenário são os exemplos de adoção de ensino aberto, *online*, à distância e flexível em larga escala e em toda a instituição. Isso é uma consequência das limitações da infraestrutura operacional existente, bem como das mentalidades. É difícil mudar essas coisas mesmo nas melhores circunstâncias. Entretanto, para benefício de longo prazo e resiliência contra distúrbios futuros do tipo que estamos experimentando, eles devam mudar. Esse tipo de mudança requer uma reimaginação e reengenharia de práticas convencionais em toda a instituição. Este artigo apresenta um estudo de caso de uma recalibração em toda a instituição de coreografias de ensino e aprendizagem em uma universidade.

Palavras-chave: Aprendizagem aberta, a distância e flexível; Reimaginação e reengenharia de práticas educacionais; Recalibração de coreografias de ensino e aprendizagem pós COVID-19

RESUMEN

RECALIBRAR LAS COREOGRAFÍAS INSTITUCIONALES PARA EL APRENDIZAJE Y LA ENSEÑANZA ENFOCADOS EN EL FUTURO

Al comienzo de la pandemia de COVID-19, las instituciones educativas de todo el mundo han tenido que cambiar de inmediato a la enseñanza y el aprendizaje a distancia online. Si bien las instituciones con una base en el aprendizaje abierto, a distancia y flexible lo han hecho razonablemente bien en las circunstancias, la mayoría de las instituciones han luchado con este repentino alejamiento de sus operaciones convencionales basadas en campus. Sin embargo, ejemplos de las pocas adopciones e implementaciones exitosas del aprendizaje y la enseñanza

online son las operaciones boutique y a pequeña escala en un programa de estudio, un departamento o una facultad. Claramente en este escenario faltan ejemplos de adopción a gran escala y en toda la institución del aprendizaje abierto, online, a distancia y flexible. Esto es una consecuencia de las limitaciones de la infraestructura operativa existente, así como de la mentalidad. Estos son difíciles de cambiar en el mejor de los casos, aunque para obtener un beneficio a largo plazo y la capacidad de recuperación frente a las perturbaciones futuras del tipo que estamos experimentando actualmente, deben cambiar. Este tipo de cambio requiere una reinención y una reingeniería de las prácticas convencionales en toda la institución. Este artículo presenta un estudio de caso de una recalibración institucional de coreografías de enseñanza y aprendizaje en una universidad.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje abierto, a distancia y flexible; Reimaginación y reingeniería de prácticas educativas; Recalibración de coreografías de aprendizaje y enseñanza post COVID-19

Introduction

Learning and teaching services in universities around the world are organized in a wide variety of ways and operate under various labels and governance structures. Their core business nevertheless, is the support of learning and teaching functions and operations of the institution. In conventional educational settings where much of the learning and teaching transaction is carried out face-to-face and in situ, it is arguable that not too much orchestration is required. However, the disruptions caused by the COVID'19 pandemic is going to significantly alter that balance in the years ahead. This shift is going to put very large numbers of institutions into unfamiliar territory. They will need help with not only a constantly changing technological landscape, but also technology-enhanced pedagogies. This is not something that can be done by anyone or anyhow. It will require more than subject matter knowledge to include technological and pedagogical knowledge. This will require a rethink and recalibration of how this is going to be organized, and orchestrated across the institution. There are three critical considerations to this reengineering and these are *technology*, *education* and *design* (NAIDU, 2016a). Using the case study as a methodological approach,

this paper describes how these considerations have been managed and orchestrated at the University of the South Pacific (NAIDU; NARAYAN, 2020).

Methodology

The University of the South Pacific serves as a case study of how one institution has approached the recalibration of its learning and teaching choreographies to get ready, not only for the disruptions caused by COVID-19, but by a variety of challenges posed to higher education institutions in the contemporary landscape. A case study is a study of a bounded system (Stake, 2006). It is a method of inquiry that involves an in-depth examination of complex phenomena and processes within the boundaries of one context. The goal of a case study is to understand the orchestration of complex phenomena in its natural setting. As such a case study begins with broad questions that seek to explain the *what*, *where*, *why* and *how* as opposed to *a priori* research questions or hypotheses (SOY, 1997; YIN, 1989). Lessons learned from this examination can be extrapolated to similar settings in different contexts.

The University of the South Pacific

The University of the South Pacific (USP) is a regional University owned and governed by twelve island nations of the southwest Pacific region. These include the Cook Islands, The Republic of Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu,

Vanuatu and Samoa (see Figure 1). The University has a physical campus in each one of the member countries and several in a few of the larger countries. Its main campus is located in Suva, the Republic of Fiji where the majority of its academic Schools are based, except for the School of Agriculture and Food Technology, which is situated at the Alafua Campus in Samoa, and the School of Law at the Emalus Campus in Vanuatu.

Figure 1: The South West Pacific Region



The USP region spreads across 33 million square kilometers over the south west Pacific Ocean. Population masses in the region vary from around 2,000 in Tokelau to a little more than 800,000 in the Republic of Fiji. For island nations this widely spread and sparsely populated, a conventional campus-based educational operation was going to be inadequate for its educational needs. The Morris Report which recommended the establishment of USP not only saw open and flexible learning as an essential function of the university but critical to its future as a regional university. It noted that, “the University should have an extra-mural department to enable it to carry university studies to towns and villages throughout the

region, and to promote understanding of and affection for the University in the people of distance areas” (MORRIS et al., 1966).

These were bold aspirations, for there was little expertise and experience around at that time in how this kind of open learning and teaching arrangements were going to be operationalized. The challenge was gigantic right from the start. Foremost, the new University would have to be a respectable institution of higher learning, like many others around the world. Yet it would need to be different in order to serve, not just one country and one community, but several with little expertise and experience of formal tertiary education, let alone open educational practices (LATCHEM, 2018).

While a select few of the region's population are able to access educational opportunities provided by USP on its main campuses, there is a very large number of potential students with unmet demands for higher education in all of the island nations of the region (see HOLLINGS; NAIDU, 2020; NARAYAN, 2021). The University needed to think about its learning and teaching transaction differently from that of a conventional campus-based educational setting. Such a rethink involved not simply about the delivery of lectures and subject matter content in packaged forms, but the use of technology to support the student learning experience (CHANDRA, 2018).

A growing access to information and communications technologies in the region offers the University a wider variety of opportunities to support its learning and teaching operations. These include the adoption of flexible learning as part of mainstream learning and teaching operations across the University, as well as the adoption of open educational resources in support, and mitigate the costs of educational resources. To address some of these opportunities, the University has developed and adopted policies designed to reform its learning and teaching practices. Key attributes of this initiative are enabling: 1) open access to learning opportunities; 2) adoption of open and flexible learning strategies; and 3) engagement with open scholarship, which is open and free use of educational resources (NAIDU, 2016b).

For the new University of the South Pacific a serious and systemic engagement with open and flexible approaches to learning and teaching, both on and off the campuses is not an option but a necessity. This has involved the adoption of unconventional approaches, including the use of technology to support the educational transaction which is an important and defining characteristic and driven by a need to reach the learner who was traditionally considered "unreachable". Engagement in flexible learning and open educational practices is crucial for Pacific Islanders, if they are

to achieve freedom, justice and equality for all as suggested by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (SEN, 1999).

After 50 years of this kind of effort, USP has morphed into a respectable comprehensive institution that is widely known and highly regarded for its leadership in *open, flexible and distance learning*. On the back of this track record, and over the last triennium, USP has embarked on a progressive agenda designed to map out a future of learning and teaching for the next generation of Pacific Islanders. This has comprised the development of two key policies. The first of these policies is around the university's engagement with flexible learning, and the second is around its adoption of open educational resources. These policies have the potential to "future proof" learning and teaching at the University and set it on a path to even greater excellence unmatched by its competitors (NAIDU; ROBERTS, 2018).

Governance structure

The governance of learning and teaching at the University is managed by a robust organizational structure which has a Deputy Vice Chancellor (equivalent to a Vice President) driving the Education agenda with the support of a Pro-Vice Chancellor specifically responsible for the open, distance and flexible learning portfolio. The business of learning and teaching at the University is carried out through a rigorous committee process. These committees comprise the *Senate*, *Academic Programs Committee (APC)*, *Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (TQC)*, *Flexible Learning Committee (FLC)* and *Innovations in Technology-enhanced Learning (ITeL) Committee*. The APC and TQC are academic committees of the Senate and report to it on all matters related to the quality of learning and teaching at the University. Their membership is drawn from all sections of the academic community. The FLC and ITeL report to TQC on all matters related to open, flexible and technology-enhanced learning, and their

role is to drive innovation in technology-enhanced learning at the University.

The work of these committees is driven by three critical policies. These are the *Learning and Teaching* policy (LT), *Flexible Learning* policy (FL) and *Open Educational Resources* policy (OER). The LT policy provides directions for all learning and teaching transactions at the University. The FLP policy provides the parameters for the adoption and integration of flexible learning and teaching at the University, while the OER policy provides direction for the adoption and use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in order to increase access to, and support high quality learning and teaching at the University.

The role of the Center for Flexible Learning

In this manner, learning and teaching at USP is a deliberate and planned activity. It comprises learning and teaching methods that allow students to progress through study programs across a range of academic disciplines to achieve high level and relevant learning outcomes. This enables the University to be highly cognizant of, and committed to the region's expectations of the skills and knowledge it needs and expects its students to acquire and develop.

The Center for Flexible Learning (CFL) plays a pivotal role in the direction of this effort. It is part of the DVC Education's portfolio and it provides leadership and direction to stakeholders in all aspects of flexible approaches to learning and teaching at the University. The main role of CFL is to support and help the University achieve its Strategic Plan KPIs in this area. This involves working with Faculties in the design and development of academic programs for flexible learning and teaching, hosting and managing online learning technologies, including orientation and onboarding of students and staff in their use of Moodle, Lecture Capture, Mahara (eportfolio tool), TurnItIn, Web conferencing and other learning technologies.

Under the leadership of a Pro-Vice Chancellor, Flexible Learning, the Center comprises three teams: (1) *Learning experience design and development* team is responsible for the design and development of productive flexible learning experiences for students; (2) *Learning technologies & analytics* team is responsible for the sponsorship and support of learning technologies for effective, efficient and engaging learning and teaching environments; and (3) *Open educational practices* team which promotes the adoption of open educational practices at the University (see Figure 2).

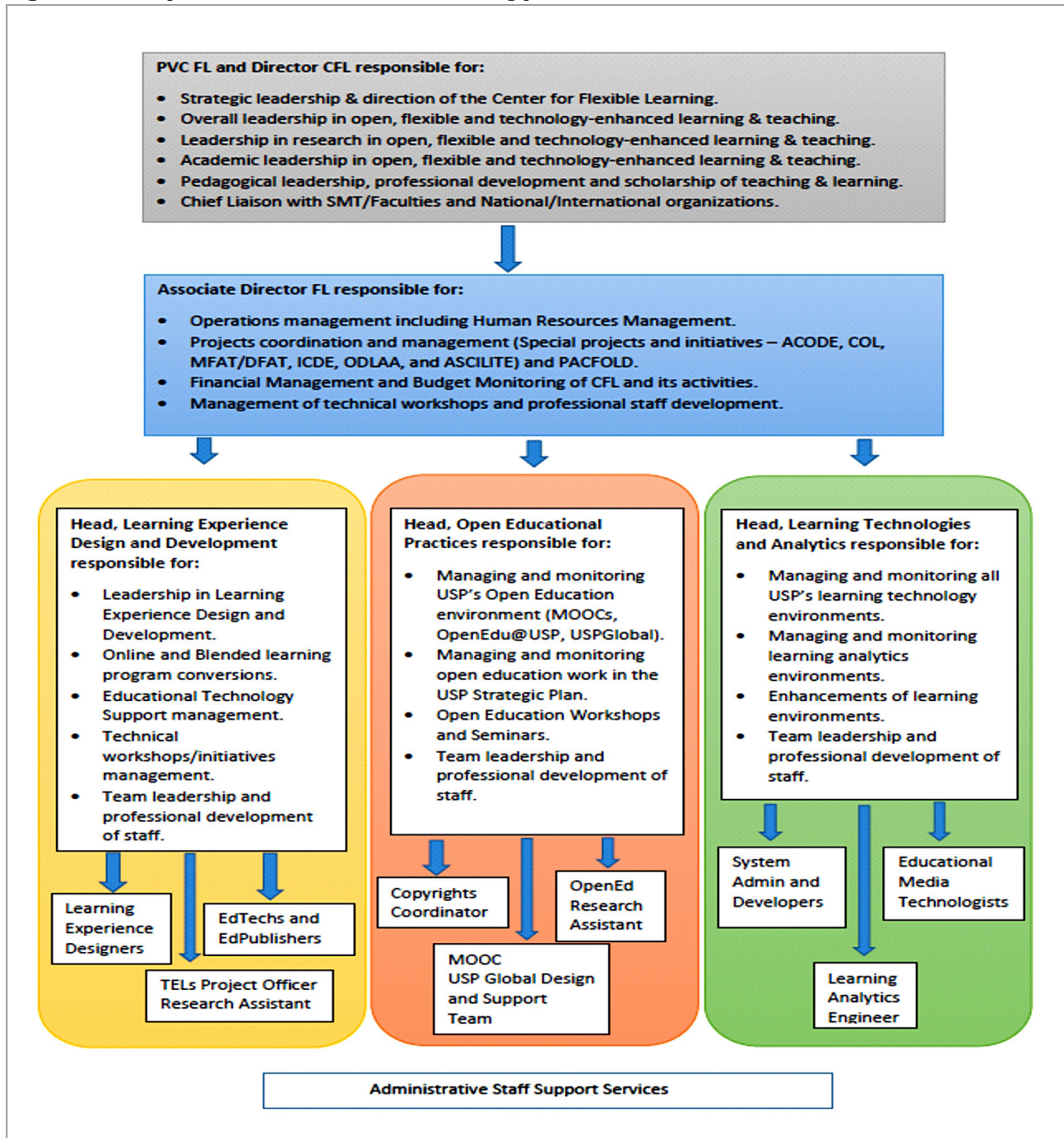
Learning Experience Design and Development

We are of the view that we cannot design *learning* per se, as it is a cognitive activity that is a consequence of both solitary and social processes (NAIDU; BEDGOOD, 2012). All we can hope to achieve is arrange the conditions and experiences of learners for effective and engaging learning to occur. The Learning Experience Design and Development (LXDD) team in CFL works with stakeholders, particularly the teaching staff to design and develop these kinds of learning experiences for students. This involves meeting the expectations of the flexible learning policy, open educational resources policy, and capacity building in their adoption and integration at the University. Led by a Head, the LXDD team comprises a suite of Learning Experience Designers, Educational Technologists and Electronic Publishers.

A standard course design and development team for flexible learning courses at the University comprises a Learning Experience Designer (Team leader and project manager), an Educational Technologist and an Electronic Publisher along with the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). And as necessary, staff from the various sections of the University such as the Library, Disability Specialists, Student Learning Specialist, and IT are also included. A key focus of the LXDD team is the design and develop-

ment of productive learning experiences for students for Flexible Learning (FL). These are authentic educational experiences that learners find meaningful, relevant, and motivating.

Figure 2: The open, distance and flexible learning portfolio.



A portfolio for learning experience design and development is formulated and coordinated by the Head – LXDD. This portfolio provides a snapshot and plan for the LXDD team giving a holistic and scalable approach to course design and development, with awareness of what

courses have been developed, what needs revising and what needs to be developed for flexible learning. The majority of new or revised courses come to the LXDD team for design and development after these have gone through the scrutiny of various committees such as the

Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC), the Academic Programs Committee and the University Senate.

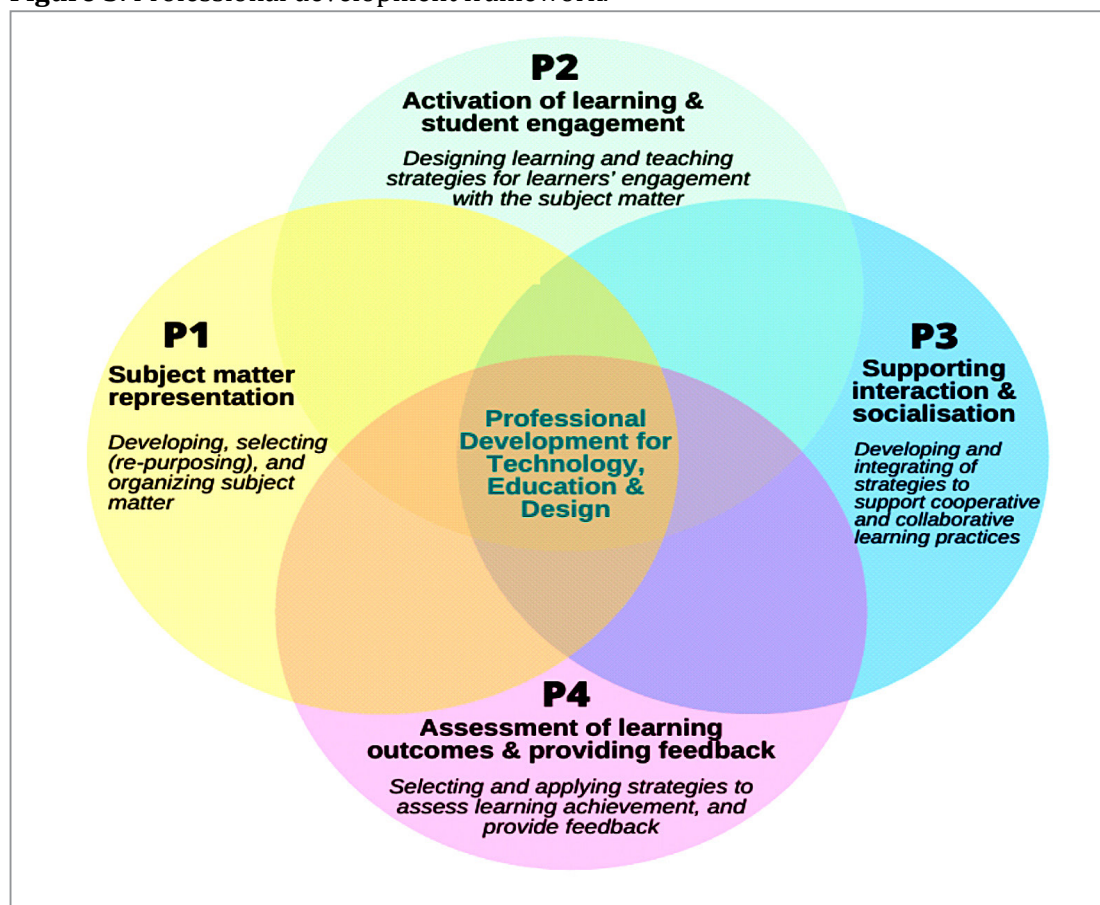
The time it takes to develop a new course, or revise an existing course may depend on the type of course, its content, level and skills of the team. It takes the LXDD team approximately 5-7 months to prepare a course ready for implementation. Sometimes, a “development on the go” strategy is applied where the actual course design and development or revision occurs simultaneously while the course is being taught.

Since 2015, the University has adopted the Quality Matters (QM) (<https://www.quality-matters.org/>) framework for quality assurance of the design and development of courses. All courses go through an internal self-review

using the Quality Matters standards. This internal-self review is carried out by LXDD’s staff who are already QM certified. The Head – LXDD serves as the institutional QM coordinator and is directly responsible for coordinating the quality assurance processes.

The LXDD team also provides support, consultations, advocacy and professional development opportunities such as workshops and webinars at the University. These focus on promoting best practices in the design, development and the orchestration of productive learning experiences, as well as the exploration of the potentials of technologies for leveraging key processes of the learning and teaching transaction. Figure 3 presents a framework for these professional development activities.

Figure 3. Professional development framework.



This framework is based on key components of the learning and teaching transaction. These comprise the presentation of subject matter content to learners; activation and engagement

of learners with that content; supporting of interaction and engagement among learners in relation to the content, and assessment of their understanding and learning achievement

(NAIDU, 2003). Table 1 presents the list of professional development activities offered in 2020 mapped against the four core process-

es outlined in the professional development framework in Figure 3.

Table 1. Portfolio of professional development workshops and resources (2020).

P1: SUBJECT MATTER REPRESENTATION	P2: ACTIVATION OF LEARNING AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LHTTO: Learning how to teach online course • FL2: Preparing and developing a blended course workshop • MW1: Moodle basics I & II workshop • PW1: Getting started with Perusall workshop • Moodle staff guide • ePortfolio toolkit • Perusall FAQs for Teachers • Digital video: A guide for teaching and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LHTTO: Learning how to teach online course • FL1: Videos for interaction and engagement workshop • FL4: ePortfolios workshop • FL5: eModeration workshop • MW1: Moodle basics I & II workshop • 3B1: Introduction to BigBlueButton workshop • ZW1: Zoom training workshop for beginners • PW1: Getting started with Perusall workshop • Moodle staff guide • ePortfolio toolkit • BigBlueButton guide for staff • Zoom beginners guide • Perusall FAQs for Teachers • Digital video: A guide for teaching and learning
P3: SUPPORTING INTERACTION AND SOCIALISATION	P4: ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LHTTO: Learning how to teach online course • FL1: Videos for interaction and engagement • FL4: ePortfolios workshop • FL5: eModeration workshop • MW1: Moodle basics I & II workshop • PW1: Getting started with Perusall workshop • Moodle staff guide • ePortfolio toolkit • Perusall FAQs for Teachers • Digital video: A guide for teaching and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LHTTO: Learning how to teach online course • FL3_T: Assessment and feedback – The toolbox • FL4: ePortfolios workshop • MW2: Moodle assessment workshop • MW3: Moodle marksheet workshop • PW1: Getting started with Perusall workshop • Moodle staff guide • ePortfolio toolkit • Turnitin guide for staff • Perusall FAQs for Teachers

The disruptions caused by COVID-19 pandemic required a significant upscaling of professional development support for teaching staff. This has included the need for both group-based workshops as well as just-in-time support in online learning and teaching. Some of these activities were offered completely online and in blended modes (with a mix of online activities and face-to-face sessions) over a period of 5-10 working days. Online self-regulated resources supporting the staff and students on the use of learning technologies (including the use of the learning management system) were also

created/revised as part of this support.

In 2020, these guides and resources were accessed 50,000+ times by 7,000+ users. For the very first time in 2020 the LXDD Team initiated a webinar series to enable staff to showcase and share strategies for designing and facilitating effective and authentic online assessment activities and feedback. These webinars have been received very well with participants from the wider University community and the Pacific region sharing their insights and experiences. Figure 4 provides a quick overview of the rollout and uptake of these workshops and resources in 2020.

Figure 4: Overview and uptake of professional development activities in 2020.



Source: 2020 CFL's Professional Development Report.

An increasing number of teaching staff participated in these workshops, with 94% of them rating these as good or excellent. Figure 5 captures some of their comments.

Figure 5. Feedback from some of the workshop participants



Source: 2020 CFL's Professional Development Report.

Learning Technologies and Analytics

The Learning Technologies and Analytics portfolio comprises two sub-teams; (1) the *Learning Systems* and (2) the *Multimedia* teams. The Learning Systems Team (LST) team manages and maintains the University's Learning Management System (LMS) and related learning technologies.

USP is moving decisively to adopt and integrate a wide variety of technologies to support

flexible and technology-enhanced learning and teaching opportunities at the University. The technological infrastructure of this recalibration of learning and teaching choreographies at USP is provided by *USPConnect* (see Figure 6), and a multimedia design studio (see Figure 7). These comprise a suite of tools that are being amassed continuously to support various technology enhanced learning and teaching initiatives. Currently these tools including the following:

- **Moodle** serves as the University's online learning management system.

- **Mahara** is an eportfolio tool used by students to catalogue their course-related work.
- **Opencast** is a lecture capture system that records all face-to-face lectures offered at the University and made available on Moodle for review by students;
- **BigBlueButton** and **ZOOM** are web conferencing systems for students to connect and communicate with staff and peers from various locations throughout the region;
- **Turnitin** is a text matching tool used to detect cases of breaches of academic integrity;
- **Alfresco** is an opencast media platform for storage of content and streaming of media; and
- **Edu-sharing** is a platform that powers an OER repository

Figure 6: USPCConnect (USPs integrated TEL architecture)

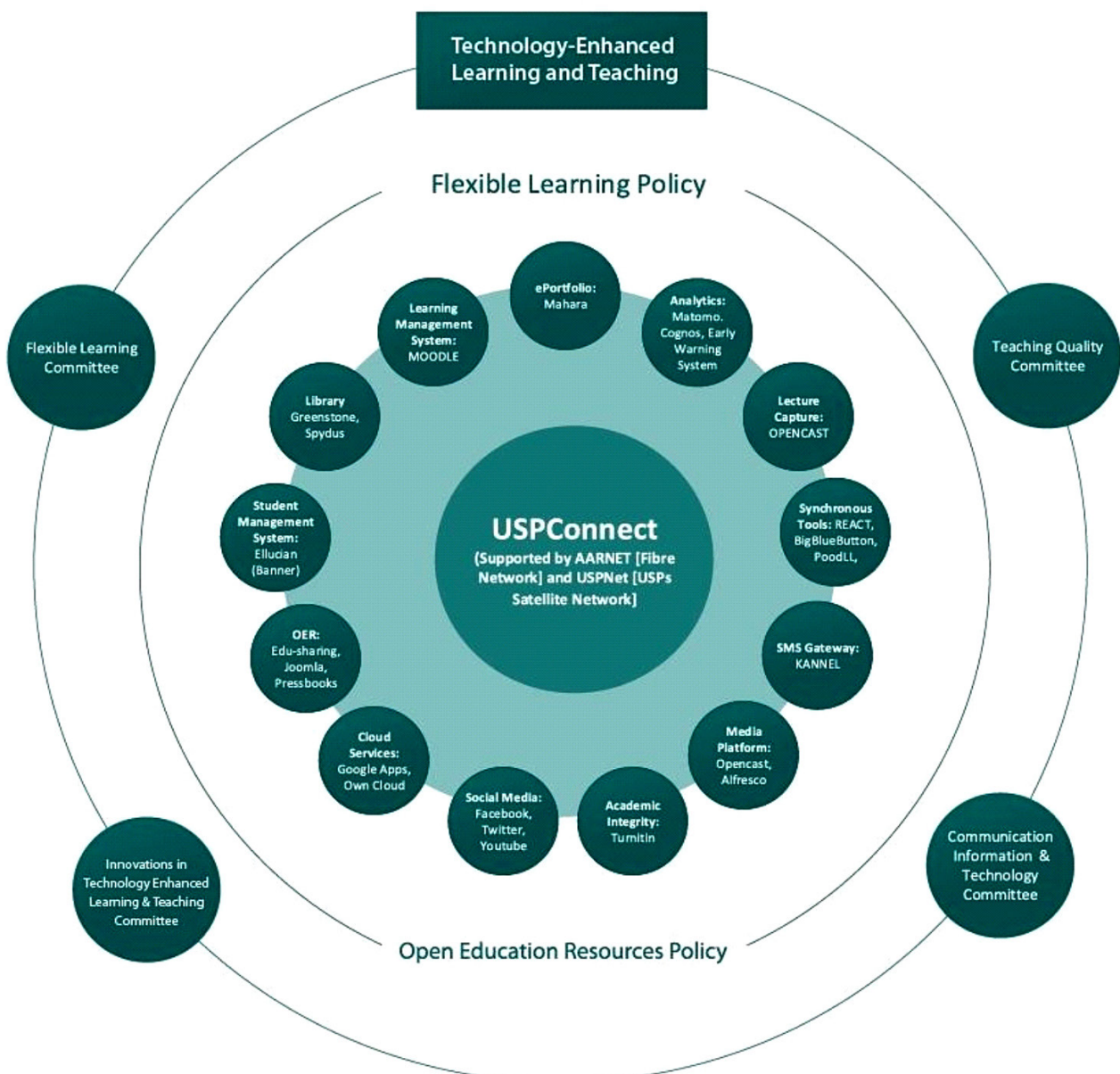
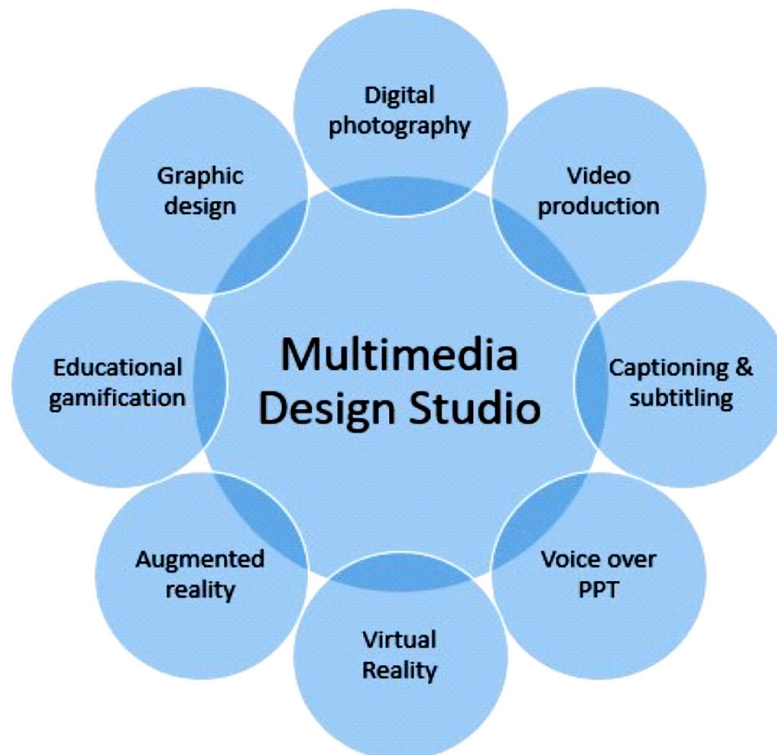


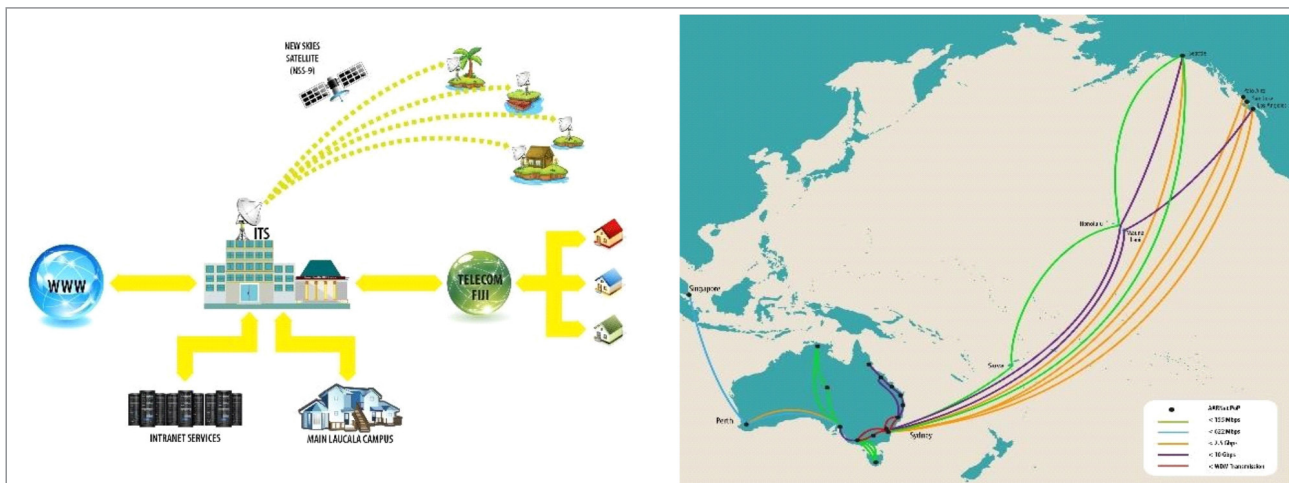
Figure 7: Multimedia design studio



These tools rely on a robust technology infrastructure (See Figure 8: The USP ICT infrastructure). One is *USPNet*, a *WAN (Wide Area Network)* incorporating hybrid satellite and submarine fiberoptic technology which delivers Internet-based administrative and

educational services to staff and students in the region. And the other is *AARNet (Australian Academic Research Network)* which offers USP access to a global education and research network, and a much wider range of resources.

Figure 8: The USP ICT infrastructure



Source: Latchem, (2018).

With growing interest in the use of technology, especially digital technologies in learning and teaching at the University as well as OER,

there is a commensurate rise in the need for data on staff and student use of these technologies and resources in their learning and

teaching as well as perceptions of their value more generally. As such, *Learning Analytics* is a growing area within this portfolio.

Open Educational Practice (OEP)

The University's 2019 – 2021 Strategic Plan – Priority Area 1 seeks to *ensure all programs contain flexible learning opportunities, and the effective use of libraries and open educational resources*. This implies the adoption of innovative pedagogies in the realization of its graduate attributes and outcomes. The adoption of innovative pedagogies means the use of *open, flexible and online learning* strategies to promote efficient, effective and engaging learning experiences for various learning contexts.

The concept of “openness” is not new to this University. It comprises several key dimensions including open access to learning, learning at anytime, anywhere and at any pace, as well as open scholarship which involves engagement with a culture of sharing including the release of educational resources under an open license scheme that permits no-cost access, and permissions to adopt, adapt, retain and redistribute such resources with appropriate restrictions.

A key initiative as part of this portfolio is *USPGlobal* which seeks to offer alternative learning opportunities and pathways to regional and the global audience including first time learners, as well as lifelong learners with opportunities for upskilling, and reskilling for the next generation workplace. Its goal is to open up opportunities for just-in-time learning, learning on demand and micro credentialing from a reputable and digitally enhanced institution with a pedigree in, and strong record of accomplishment of educational provision for transformative learning experiences.

The premise of *USPGlobal* is consistent with the idea of USP, which has included the need to “carry university studies to towns and villages throughout the Region, and to promote understanding of, and affection for the University in

people of distant areas” (MORRIS et al., 1966). *USPGlobal* strengthens and extends a trajectory on which it has always been.

The Open Education portfolio also incorporates the provision of consultancy services in the use of open, flexible and technology-enhanced methods in the region. More recently this has included the development of a Memorandum of Understanding between USP and the South Pacific Commission to enhance synergies in delivering services to their mutual membership. One of the projects implemented as part of this agreement in 2019 – 2020 was the *Distance Learning Program on Energy Efficient Operation of Ships* in the region. The Project sought to promote knowledge creation on renewable energy on vessels and foster capacity building for domestic ship operators in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories with a view to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through technical and operational measures. Other projects include the development of educational resources to support the teaching of STEM subjects in the region, support for out of school youth, and youth workers in the region.

Transitioning to technology-enhanced learning and teaching

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic the Centre for Flexible Learning has played a pivotal role in the University's transition to learning and teaching online. This has included supporting all faculties in their move to online learning, and collecting and curating resources to support USP staff and students to help this transition. These resources have included advice on technology options, best practices and continuing professional development of staff.

Other resources for staff have included assistance with getting their lectures and examinations online, and for students these have included a call center, loan of equipment (electronic devices) to those who needed it,

subsidized rates for access to the Internet, as well as fee subsidies where necessary. These have all been driven and coordinated by the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) with the help of a newly constituted Learning and Teaching Continuity Committee. A 20-point Course Readiness checklist has been developed and adopted to assess the readiness of all courses moving from face-to-face to the online mode. All face-to-face courses are audited against this checklist and assistance and support provided to courses that need to be transformed from face-to-face to teaching online.

Much of the success of this transition to teaching and learning online is due to the trajectory that USP has been on since its inception. Ever since its establishment in the late 1960s, the University has taken decisive steps to take learning and teaching out to the communities where its students are based and not relying on students getting to where the University campuses are based and from where much of the teaching is generated. This comprised a strong record of accomplishment in *open, flexible and technology-enhanced learning* which has helped the University move to large scale online learning easily and rapidly. Two developments in particular, over the past 5 to 6 years has played a significant role in relation to this work.

The first was an external review of the Center for Flexible Learning in 2014. The recommendations of this review had ensured that CFL was on a path already towards the adoption of, not only online learning, but a consolidated and an institution wide approach to flexible learning. As a result of this effort, there was significant increase in the move to blended and fully online learning before COVID-19. The Centre for Flexible Learning also rapidly moved away from a focus on 'distance education' to 'technology-enhanced education'. This meant foremost, a reorganization and refocus of its activities and staffing to focus both, on its services, and its educational functions. This

comprised a rethink and re-engineering of its staff complement and its activities, notably in the areas of *open educational practices* and *learning analytics*.

As part of this re-engineering, two new portfolios were developed over the past three years. One is the position of a *Learning Analytics Engineer* and the other is that of an *Open Education Design Architect*. The unique nomenclature of these positions is very intentional. The Learning Analytics Engineer's position is intended to drive thinking and activities around learning analytics, as opposed to simply data mining. And the Open Education Design Architect is expected to map out and promote an architecture of open educational practice, beyond the adoption and use of open educational resources.

A second important development was a shift in thinking at the University level which comprised the reorganization of traditional committees to ensure they too focused on education specifically technology-enhanced education, and professional development of staff. The Innovations in Technology-Enhanced Learning Committee provides a vehicle for institution-wide discussions and engagement in the area. This initiative is pivotal in securing internal research funds and external support, and in shifting thinking and promoting the scholarship of learning and teaching with staff across the academic units engaging in research-informed practice via targeted research projects. This has helped shift perceptions and thinking across the University about the nature and role of the Centre for Flexible Learning in learning and teaching. Projects in the early rounds of this initiative has covered issues and challenges around designing for mobile and blended learning, assessment of learning outcomes in large online learning contexts, proctoring of online examinations, use of tablet computers and the effectiveness of lecture capture, embedding academic literacy, and the use of technology for specialist needs such as disability support (NAIDU; NARAYAN, 2020).

A very significant project as part of this initiative has been a longitudinal study of *Technology Access and Use by USP Students*. Two surveys have been developed (one for staff and the other for students) based on those developed by EDUCAUSE’s Educational Centre for Academic Research’s (ECAR). The goal of these surveys is to inform decision making around learning and teaching by keeping a finger on the pulse of technology access and use by USP staff and students, shifts over a period of time in relation to their access to technology, and use of it and their perceptions about it. Reports of these surveys present quantitative data on: *device ownership, usage and importance; network satisfaction and usage; learning environment and academic experience; technology and student engagement; along with student demographic data.*

The University’s 2013-2018 strategic plan

had the University already on path to greater flexibility in learning and teaching. This, amongst other things, comprised a substantial target of conversion of courses to online and blended modes of learning following the rigorous Quality Matters criteria. This was no mean achievement, given the number of courses and the wide spread of academic disciplines involved. The result was a substantially different student experience, with whole programs of study available via flexible modes, enabling students from across our vast geographical region access to quality technology-enhanced learning. Long before COVID-19 struck, USP already had 30 percent of its academic programs available fully online, and 60 percent of its programs available in blended modes (see Table 2). Students’ academic performance in these modes has shown no discernable difference compared with face-to-face teaching.

Table 2. Courses on offer via mode

NUMBER OF USP COURSES ON OFFER VIA MODE			
	2018	2019	2020
Face to face (F)	557	543	558
Blended (B)	367	381	393
Online (O)	273	302	306
Print (P)	97	90	91

Source: USP Handbook & Calendar (2018, 2019; 2020)

Concluding remarks

The adoption of the idea of open and flexible learning is one thing, and yet another when it comes to being able to use technologies in ways academics and other stakeholders have never considered before. There are numerous examples of these, including the use of videos for presenting content, promoting interaction among students and with staff, and providing rapid and timely feedback on online formative assessment. Other examples include the affordances of academic integrity tools for

proctoring of online examinations. Interest in the influence of technology in the enhancement of learning and teaching is critical, and one on which there is considerable debate. We are of the view that the influence of both, the technology and the pedagogical approach is related, and not easily separated. Its orchestration in educational settings is a complex process, and one that requires careful reengineering. It requires along with suitable administrative structures, appropriate policies, and skilled staff.

Acknowledgement

This article is based on a self-review report prepared for a 2020 external review of the Center for Flexible Learning at the University of the South Pacific. The contributions of all staff of the Center in the development of this self-review report is acknowledged.

REFERENCES

CHANDRA, R. Foreword. In: LATCHEM, C. Fifty Years of Flexible Learning at the University of the South Pacific. Fiji: USP Press, 2018

HOLLINGS, M.; NAIDU, S. Developing Practice in the Pacific. In: MAYS, T.; SINGH, R. K. (Eds). Addressing the Learning Needs of Out-of-School Children and Youths through Expansion of Open Schooling, Commonwealth of Learning (COL), p. 235-256, 2020. Available at: <http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3731>. Access: May 1st 2021.

LATCHEM, C. Fifty Years of Flexible Learning at the University of the South Pacific. Fiji: USP Press, 2018.

MORRIS C. et al. Report of the Higher education mission to the South Pacific. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966. Available at: https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Her_Majesty's_Stationery_Office. Access: May 1st 2021.

NAIDU S.; BEDGOOD, D.R. Learning in the Social Context. In: SEEL, N.M. (eds). Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning. Springer, Boston, MA: Springer, 2012. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_814. Access: May 1st 2021.

NAIDU, S. & Narayan, S. (Eds.) (2020). Teaching and Learning with Technology: Pushing boundaries and breaking down walls. USP Press: The University of the South Pacific.

NAIDU, S. Technology, education and design: The sciences of the artificial. In: PANIGRAHI, M. N. (Ed.). ICT integrated teacher education. In Resource Book on ICT Integrated Teacher Education, (20-30), New Delhi: Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, 2016a

NAIDU, S. The case for open educational practice. **Distance Education**, v. 37, n. 1, p. 1-3, 2016b. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2016.1157010>. Access: May 1st 2021.

NAIDU, S. (Ed.). **Learning and Teaching with Technology**. London: Routledge, 2003.

NAIDU, S.; ROBERTS, K. J.. Future Proofing Higher Education in the Pacific with Open and Flexible Learning. **Journal of Learning for Development**, v. 5, n. 3, p. 280-295, 2018. <https://jl4d.org/index.php/ejl4d/article/view/309/349>. Access: May 1st 2021.

NARAYAN, S. **Out-of-school children: A contemporary view from the pacific island countries of the Commonwealth**,. British Columbia, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning, 2021. Available at: <http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3779>. Access: May 1st 2021.

SEN, A. **Development as freedom**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

SOY, Susan K. **The case study as a research method**. 1997. Available at: <http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~ssoy/usesusers/l391d1b.htm>. Access: May 1st 2021.

STAKE, R.E. **Multiple Case Study Analysis**. New York & London: The Guildford Press, 2006.

YIN, R.K.. **Case study research design and method**. Newbury Park: Sage, 1989.

Received: May 2nd 2021
Accepted: Aug. 11th 2021



Este é um artigo publicado em acesso aberto sob uma licença Creative Commons.