

Space-place shifts: is the digital space a learning place for commencing students?

Jill Lawrence

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia

lawrence@usq.edu.au

This paper explores a shift generated by one of the change factors impacting on the Australian higher education sector: the increasing implementation of technological engagement and e-learning. The paper documents a case study investigating whether the digital *space* can constitute a *place* for learning for commencing students. The case study focuses on a first year core course, *Building Professional Nursing Attributes A*, offered as part of the Nursing Program at the University of Southern Queensland. In 2012 the course moved from an on campus to an online mode. The paper documents the design, development, delivery and evaluation of its conversion to online delivery. The paper also positions these pedagogical decisions and their outcomes in practice against the wider change forces driving both the higher education sector and students' university experience. The case study's findings show that although there are sceptics, principally among the course's diverse cohort of students, as well as initial tensions, its digital space is a place where commencing students can begin to empower themselves; a place where they can learn to contemplate, converse, reflect, and create and disseminate knowledge as they make their transition to the new university space.