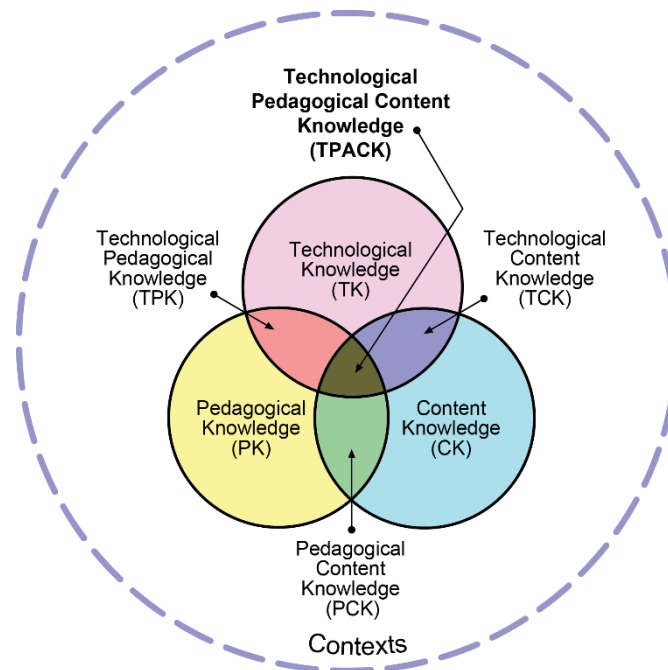


Putting design into practice? Investigating the relationship between digital skills and blended learning standards

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The shift into blended learning requires faculties to be able to design learning activities delivered in both virtual and physical learning spaces. Previous research has shown that there is still a gap in lecturer's knowledge of the use of learning technologies. A successful integration of ICT in education follows from a strategy that aligns technology use with pedagogical approach (Mishra and Koehler 2006). The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK, as shown below) is a measure of teachers pedagogical, content and technical knowledge and their skill to embed technology in practice.



TPACK Framework

In our study of 112 lecturers across the partnership on aspects of TPACK and blended learning, the following findings were found:

- On a 5-point Likert scale, lecturers self-rating of their pedagogical knowledge was above average, but their technical knowledge was lower in comparison to existing studies using this measure.

- Lecturers who have high TPACK scores tend to provide more interactive learning activities in the VLE.
- Full-time lecturers and those with teaching qualification in HE were found to have higher TPACK scores.
- Staff perceptions of what blended learning varies, most defining it as the blend of face-to-face and online learning environment, but others define it in terms of a mixture of modalities or mixture of teaching strategies. This confusion is mirrored in the literature.
- 56% of the respondents were not aware of the institution's blended learning standards; 77% responded that they have not used it in practice. While many are unaware of institution standards, they are nevertheless implementing these standards in their own design of learning environments. From the interviews/survey it appears that staff are aware of the problems surrounding blended learning and how they work on strategies to solve these such as induction programmes and effective communication. They also seem to spend a lot of time and effort updating IT skills and many would appreciate more formal support in this area (78% stated that they would appreciate guidelines on how to implement blended learning into their teaching).

There is a need to provide a varied approach to develop staff competencies. Some staff would require more guidance in terms of technology, but others also need support in developing their pedagogical knowledge to implement blended learning (particularly part-time staff). This support can be in the form of training, providing examples of best practice, and providing access to people who can provide support in addition to a guidance document.