

ASCILITE 2024

Navigating the Terrain:

Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

Rethinking content design for small 3cp units

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A new early childhood course at the University of New England (UNE) has been developed with a combination of 3cp and 6cp units. The 3cp units were developed with consideration to the UNE early childhood student cohort. Research on current early childhood students indicated that they are working full time alongside their studies in early childhood environments, and they can find the transition from TAFE to University difficult. The course was designed so that students started their degree with the 3cp units, with the aim to build their confidence and competence in academic skills and include relevant and practical content that could be applied within their early childhood context. The purpose of this pecha kucha is to provide an example of practice in development of smaller credit point units across a whole course.

The learning design team and early childhood team at UNE worked collaboratively on the new course design. As the early childhood team had a full-time teaching load while content development was also a priority, early childhood researchers were engaged to write content. We wanted to design the 3cp units with a consistent approach across the course and with a similar pedagogical flavour. Traditionally, we also noticed that when creating unit content and assessment, content writers often focused on the 'hours' model of developing to 150 hours per unit (for a 6cp unit). The challenge was to consider the right amount of content for 3cp units for our student audience. We needed to shift thinking from the 'hours' model to ensure that the development of 3cp content was led by the learning outcomes and assessment requirements, with content being scaffolded into this, also known as backwards design (Davis et al., 2021).

McEwan et al. (2023) identify that in academic development and curriculum design, it is necessary to provide a balance between theory and practice. So, we developed a guidance note for staff who were writing content, and a corresponding template in which to develop the content. The guidance note encouraged staff to think differently from the hours model, and encouraged content writers to think practically about the various tasks they were asking students to complete. For example, we researched average reading speeds in online environments and how this may impact the length of time to read and comprehend topic notes.

We also developed a consistent structure for content within the 3cp units that we thought would be reasonable. This was the starting point for content writers to develop content. The benefit of this is that most 3cp units have approximately the same amount of content and number of topics, aiming to create a consistent student experience. We are currently conducting research to determine the effectiveness of the 3cp units, and if they are targeted appropriately for students to help them transition from TAFE to University, and if they find the workload too much or too little. This research may also be relevant for the development of other short courses in higher education institutions.

Keywords: backwards design, content development, shifting thinking, short course design

References

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Bugden, L., Bird, J., & Mok, A. (2024). Rethinking content design for Small 3cp Units. In T. Cochrane, V. Narayan, E. Bone, C. Deneen, M. Saligari, K. Tregloan, & R. Vanderburg (Eds.), *Navigating the Terrain: Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies*. Proceedings ASCILITE 2024. Melbourne (pp. 147-148). <https://doi.org/10.14742/apubs.2024.1432>

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