Our shifting role: Reflections on three decades of work in tertiary learning development

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My journey in tertiary learning development began as a language advisor in a South African university in the early 1990s. The role gradually began to shift from the provision of generic bridging programmes for small groups of 'at risk' students to addressing whole cohort learning by embedding workshops in core courses. The establishment of collaborative partnerships with lecturers in courses depended on the willingness of individuals to allocate space in the curriculum and to work with us, so programmes were inherently fragile. On reflection, very little has changed across continents and time in our profession!

I emigrated to New Zealand in 2001, bringing with me a strong conviction of the importance of embedding learning development in coursework. A few years as an English teacher in a Foundation Studies programme at the University of Waikato provided invaluable experience of the student cohorts I was going to be working with, and insights into their needs. A subsequent move to Auckland saw me in my first role as a learning advisor in New Zealand, at the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Massey University. It was then that I also joined ATLAANZ. Massey was starting to move towards embedding learning in individual assessments and would eventually move to taking on more ambitious projects such as embedding academic literacy through the Bachelor of Nursing programme, where learning advisors contributed to the recurriculation process. This was also the first time I'd collaborated with information literacy staff to develop and co-teach embedded workshops, and it helped me to appreciate the inextricable link between the two services as we moved away from a siloed approach to learning development. We were also moving towards blending interactive learning

technology in our embedded work. My colleagues and I presented a paper at the 2018 ATLAANZ conference on the use of Articulate software to provide interactive online materials for students.

It was also at Massey that I first started doing one-to-one consultations with students, and this was an incredible learning experience. With consultations, I started to understand the importance of working backwards from what the students needed to be able to produce, to how they might navigate the journey. I realised that I'd often been presenting samples of writing as completed artefacts – beautifully presented and annotated – and ultimately intimidating for some of the students I was seeing. It was really the beginning of a continuing effort towards facilitating co-construction of knowledge, where the annotated writing sample was not the end point, but rather a step in the process of developing teaching and learning materials. Working in partnership with other learning advisors was very helpful in this regard, and I believe it's an area which requires continuing professional development for learning advisors.

A move to AUT's Te Mātāpuna Library and Learning Services in 2019 signalled the beginning of multiple new learning journeys involving new technologies. The first was developing discipline-specific content available in all courses on Canvas, AUT's learning management system. The website (called Your Library on Canvas) has proved to be popular among students, with 421,092 page views by 19,658 unique students from January to November this year. It's also been a very useful resource for learning advisors in their work with students during consultations. The transition to digital design for webpage materials did not come easily for me. It involved an epic battle and empathetic mentoring to reduce the number of words I was using to introduce samples of annotated text. From user experience (UX) research by my colleagues, I learned that the kind of narrative I might use in face-to-face teaching was out of place on a webpage where students want quick access to examples and drop-down menus for additional information. My colleague, Robyn McWilliams, and I reflected on our journey away from wordiness in a paper we did for the ATLAANZ Northern Hui in 2023 entitled Success with less: Reducing word splurge in online resources.

Supporting learner success in the age of GenAI has been a fast-tracked journey into a world of ever-changing opportunities and challenges. Advice on using AI effectively and ethically in assessment preparation now features prominently in many of our generic workshops,

and requests for incorporation of this component in embedded workshops have become routine. Our work with AI tools is informed by two key principles. The first is that any AI tool should complement, not replace, learning for students. The second is that use of that tool should be modelled for students and facilitated in workshops. To this end, our teaching and learning activities focus on establishing a foundation of knowledge on the targeted academic literacy skill(s) before introducing and facilitating use of the tools. We've recently begun to work with AI agents designed for specific assessments and controlled by instructions on how to interact with students, often as a Socratic tutor to facilitate learning. Co-constructing these agents with course lecturers is an exciting new part of our embedded work.

In the past two years, I've learned that our role as learning advisors is complemented, not replaced, by AI technologies. With our limited resources, we can often offer only single embedded workshops in courses, and one-to-one consultations with students have become a luxury. If used appropriately, Gen AI tools offer students a service that never sleeps, and we're likely to be developing more and more tools as we begin to understand how students can use them effectively in their learning. It's an exciting time to be a learning advisor, and I look forward to seeing how ATLAANZ members are adapting their practice to combine the human presence with GenAI!