Chapter 118
Towards More Socio-Culturally Sensitive Research and Study of Workplace E-Learning

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ABSTRACT

This article advocates workplace adult education and training researchers and scholar practitioners interested in career and technical education (CTE), adult education and technology, and who are attempting social and cultural critiques of workplace e-learning. The emphasis on the technological and artefactual in workplace e-learning research and study are not producing the expected learning outcomes from workplace adult education and training to the degree anticipated. Given increasingly global and diverse workforces, the research and study of workplace e-learning as a socio-culturally 'negotiated' space may be an alternate approach toward a more socially and culturally informed understanding of adult learning from workplace e-learning.

BACKGROUND

Socio-Culturally-Based Research and Study of Workplace E-Learning

Despite a growing, global cohort of learners that is socially and culturally heterogeneous, there is a conspicuous paucity of research and study when it comes to investigations based on a socio-cultural treatment of workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training. Then, is it sufficient to proclaim that workplace e-learning is the panacea for all education and training needs as a sensate artefact of technological innovation or economies of scale? Do greater functionality and scalability, or the introduction of reusable code or modularity, necessarily equate to better learning and education when the socio-cultural are not even recognized? Better hardware and software do not necessarily result in better adult learning (Baggaley, 2008).

When it comes to the juxtaposition(s) of people, technology, and culture, betterment of workplace adult educational quality may actually be *more* influenced by what and how people think, feel, conceive, and perceive about themselves, and each other, than what they see on the screens in front of them (Bell, Kanara, & Kozlowski, 2008; Feenberg, 1991b; Ismail, 2002; Parrish, 2004; Remtulla, 2007).

A socio-culturally sensitive research and study of workplace e-learning contemplates these critical issues in order to redress the prevalent insensitivities of workplace e-learning for workplace education and training:

1. What normative and universalizing outcomes shaping 'e-learning' interventions in the workplace today, make workplace e-learning increasingly unresponsive to the learning needs and educational aspirations of the global and diverse workforce?
2. How may socio-culturally sensitive research and study, based on epistemological, pedagogical and ontological critiques of workplace e-learning, alleviate this normative and universalizing predicament for the benefit a global and diverse workforce?

'Socio-cultural sensitivity of workplace e-learning' thus refers to the cultural, conditional and communal needs of a diverse workforce as they undergo workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training (Remtulla, 2010). Socio-cultural critiques on communal, contextual and cultural needs of the global workforce remain imperative as in/visible diversity in the workplace multiplies exponentially and the social and cultural begin to play out more prominently through a growing, global workforce that is socially and culturally heterogeneous. Such an insight is crucial for management and decision-making *prior to* significant investment in workplace e-learning

interventions. Researchers and practitioners may also find this significant to envision the possible futures of workplace e-learning for workplace adult education and training.

The Socio-Cultural Sensitivity Taxonomy

This section summarizes and explains the 'Socio-cultural Sensitivity Taxonomy for Workplace E-learning' as more fully laid out in *Socio-cultural Impacts of Workplace E-learning: Epistemology, Ontology and Pedagogy* (Remtulla, 2010). The socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy comprises four basic elements:

1. A context (social change) and an impetus (social responsibility) for a socio-culturally sensitive research and study of workplace e-learning;
2. Two outcomes (normalization and universalization) of technological artefactual approaches to workplace e-learning research and study;
3. Two dominant cultural paradigms (commodified knowledges and innovative artefact) shaping workplace e-learning historicity in organizations; and
4. Four workplace e-learning scenarios (instrumental instruction, rational training, dehumanizing ideologies, and social integration), that all present socio-cultural implications for the workforce from undertaking socio-culturally insensitive, technological artefactual approaches to workplace e-learning research and study.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 provide a diagrammatic overview of the socio-cultural sensitivity taxonomy for workplace e-learning. The accompanying frameworks are discussed later.

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