Chapter 7
The Digital Practitioner

ABSTRACT

Whereas EMFFE was a group of wise men and women reviewing possibilities in the use of extant learning technologies and then designing developmental frameworks to scaffold these possibilities, digital practitioner revealed already existing, transformational digital practice from a bottom-up perspective. Where national education policy is about providing standardised "solutions" to what the future looks like (i.e., around centralised learning management systems), "The Digital Practitioner" survey discovered changing practice on the ground and provided new concepts for describing this work. The critical discovery was that of the use of "personal" technologies (rather than business or "learning" technologies) driving change in learning. The digital practitioner emerges as a craft professional who uses their personal curiosity to redesign learning delivery. This is best described as co-creating artfully crafted, student-centred, learning experiences. This chapter describes the digital craft professional of the future, nascent now.

INTRODUCTION

Whereas we have so far looked at learning and pedagogy, and then the e-mature institution and architectures of participation in a post Web 2.0 world of technologies with participatory affordance, in this chapter we look at the changing practice of teaching in the ever-evolving digital world. Following on from some EMFFE funding to develop and fine tune the details of the proposed development framework, the work done by Geoff Rebbeck at

Thanet College to develop staff, human resources, responses to digital work, encouraged us to research teachers subjective responses to using "technology in action". This digital practitioner work presented here follows from Geoff's original insight.

Background

Having been intimately involved in the commissioning of national surveys of the use of digital technologies in post-compulsory education from 2005 onwards to 2010, when the last of these surveys was published as Official Statistics by the Office for National Statistics, it looked as though further opportunities to explore how digital technologies were operated by providers and practitioners would not be possible. As luck would have it, one of us started work at LSIS (Learning and Skills Improvement Service) after the closure of Becta, at a point when a small amount of funding became available to support a small-scale research project at the end of the 2010-11 financial year and we were asked to initiate something that would carry on the work of the national surveys, but within a very restricted budget.

The take-up by providers of the Generator Tool, (referred to in Chapter 5), from its introduction, had been very limited and it was not producing the information expected by its originators. Thus, the tool could be best described as 'languishing' on its host servers as feedback from Jisc's Regional Support Centres who were involved in supporting the use of the tool indicated that it was complicated to use and the outputs were not easy to share or generalise, putting potential users off. This feedback was confirmed, anecdotally, at national conferences by practitioners, managers and other sector agencies such as NIACE and the Association of Colleges who were struggling to use any of the aggregated outputs of Generator in their work or readily modify the proprietary code used to build it into more context sensitive functionality.

Given that the timescale for the LSIS survey was tight, we decided to try to explore how and why practitioners were using digital technologies and seek to understand how practitioners felt about digital technologies they were using and, in many cases, not using in their work. This focus was arrived at as a result of the learning from the EMFFE project and the management of the Becta national surveys. We had maintained a close contact with a number of the project participants who were continuing, despite the incentives to use Generator, to develop their work with digital technologies in generative

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