Chapter 89

Generation of Authentic Learning and Learners:
The Conditions of Learning Underpinning Blended Learning and Online Forums

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ABSTRACT

A study of 100 pre-service teacher's attitudes to self-managed online forums on pastoral care of students in schools was undertaken. This assessment activity involved the students in contributing to forums under the leadership of one of their group, whose responsibility it was to guide the discussion and then mark the members of their online group. After an initial reticence to engage in the task, students reported their satisfaction at managing their own learning and having input into the actual assessment process. This paper recommends that more possibilities for self-managed learning be made available to tertiary learners.

INTRODUCTION: A SUMMARY OF THE FRAMES OF REFERENCE

This chapter deals with a "webnography" investigation (Miller & Slater, 2001) that was centered on the question: "What were the perceived learning enablers or inhibitors of a form of 'blended approach' as understood by one cohort of pre-service teachers?" This question developed, because as the authors saw it, Gouveia (2004) lamented a decade earlier that, in regard to understanding how the use of technology in the tertiary space could be used as an authentic learning praxis, there is still much work to do in this area. This issue appears to be an ongoing concern (Shea, 2007; Marcoux, 2012). In particular, this study was also guided by a concern that while there is a developing set of "how to" texts, there appears to be scant attention paid in them to the notion of Information Communication Technology (ICT) as authentic

learning, or to the linkage between a teaching-learning ideology and practice. Herrington, Reeves and Oliver (2010) have come to the conclusion that as with all learning sites and situations, authentic ICT learning should be defined as "collaboration and the opportunity to collaboratively construct knowledge" (p. 28). While their statement would appear to have become the taken for granted as the underpinning of ICT tertiary teaching in Australia, there are a "plethora of issues" (Partridge, Ponting & McCay, 2011, p. 4) related to the implantation of this ideal. Karagiannidis, Politis, and Karasavvidis (2014) concluded that key facets related to authentic learning such as the "ideology to practice linkages" are also vitally important. As they see it, "positive impacts are more likely when linked to a teacher's existing pedagogical philosophy" (p. 7). To further summarize their position, they believe lecturers using ICTs should have a clear ideological position that is clearly aligned to their teaching praxis. However, the authors have not found any source that describes or discusses how the linkage between ideology and practice can be developed through the use of ICTs. Additionally, there is virtually no research that unpacks an underpinning ideology regarding tertiary applications or approaches. It is argued in this chapter that understanding this linkage is a critical need, as "a clearly articulated link between ideology, knowledge of how learning occurs, and practice is foundational to developing and implementing strategic alignment" (Fitzsimmons & Lanphar, 2015). More importantly, understanding this alignment could perhaps mitigate or eliminate the dehumanizing aspects of e-learning that appear to be occurring, such as a perceived superficiality of on-line content O'Regan (2003), isolation causing unresolved distress (Hara & King, 2000), and compromising or negating personal values (Goodyear & Ellis, 2008). As Stodal, Thompson and MacDonald (2006, p. 17) comment, addressing these issues is crucial "if we are to transform education and liberate the way we design and deliver on line learning."

As universities in Australia and across the globe move into the second decade of this millennium, it was forecast that this was to be the educational era in which tertiary content would be taught as "thinking and problem solving skills" (Bransford, Sherwood, Hasselbring, Kinzer & Williams, 1990, p. 65). While the research base suggests that there are pockets representing the transformation of the old transmission paradigm into this approach, there is also a degree of research literature that clearly indicates that there are still major issues to be resolved in the pastiche of approaches current in the tertiary sector in regard to how to implement authentic learning in the digital learning sphere (Oliver & Goerke 2008; Herrington, Reeves & Oliver, 2010). Davies, Howell and Petrie (2010) and Marcoux (2012) also believe that there are still deficits in the theoretical foundations underpinning technology-based education. As will be explored in an ensuing section, one of the critical educational approaches emerging from this patchwork of e-learning approaches in Australia, is the concept of "blended learning". While not a negative per se, this concept is itself in a state of growth and generates a multiplicity of understandings, to the point where blended learning has, rightly or wrongly, become synonymously equated with "flexible e-learning", and for some researchers become a term that encompasses all forms of what once termed "distance learning" (Herrington, Reeves & Oliver 2010).

Hence, the aim of this chapter is to revisit and unpack the full extent of the outcomes of a qualitative project (Creswell, 2009) that aimed initially to explore tertiary student's perceptions of the introduction of a blended learning online subject into the degree structure of one cohort of tertiary students. In a radical departure from the normal lecture-tutorial format, online forums were used in this subject as an intended means of refocusing the learning experience. The aim was to allow the students to manage their own learning in groups, contribute to an e-discussion, have an experience leading their groups and then take part in peer evaluation of the group. To paraphrase Biggs and Tang (2011), in many ways this new direction was a pedagogical experiment in "constructive alignment", or a "framework of teaching and

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