Chapter 4
Toward Diversity in Researching Teaching and Technology Philosophies-in-Practice in e-Learning Communities

Gale Parchoma
Centre for Studies in Advanced Learning Technologies (CSALT) & Lancaster University, UK

ABSTRACT

e-Learning is pervasively perceived as a singular enterprise, subject to broad claims and overarching critiques. From this viewpoint, the strengths and weakness of large-scale e-learning implementations in supporting all forms of teaching and learning in higher education can be examined through best-practices lenses. This chapter contests the e-learning singularity paradigm through examining a sample of diverse e-learning communities, each of which may be associated with distinct teaching and technology philosophies-of-practice, as well as divergent research and development histories. A gestalt view of interacting and interlocking teaching and technology philosophies underpins a call for local actions aimed at achieving the democratization of e-learning environment design and fostering both difference and connectivity across e-learning communities of research and practice.

INTRODUCTION

Much attention has been and continues to be focused on examinations and theories of e-learning adoption in higher education (Anderson, 2008; Archer, Garrison, & Anderson, 1999; Bates, 2000, 2005; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Greener & Perriton, 2005; Laurillard, 2008; Nickols, 2008; Njenga, 2008; Parchoma, 2008; Stahl & Hesse, 2009). To date, this discourse has been marked by generalist approaches, which tend to condense all forms of technology-mediated teaching and learning practices in higher education (HE) into an ill-defined field of e-learning research; and advocacy approaches, which promote or redress specific frameworks and models for adoption. Both approaches tend to be spiced with either pro- or anti-commentaries on "technopositivist ideology, a compulsory enthusiasm" (Njenga, 2008, p.2), for the potential for technology to transform teaching and learning in HE. Similarly, both approaches tend to ignore or reject the interrelationships be-

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tween disciplinary ways of knowing, underpinning philosophies of teaching and technology, and the resultant degrees of alignment or disconnect with institutionally mandated e-learning systems.

In this chapter, I explore an alternative route through contested e-learning territories, a route initially opened for exploration through Kanuka's (2008) work on understanding e-learning technologies-in-practice through philosophies-in-practice. References are made to higher education [HE], adult education [AE], technology and educational technology literatures in order to bring a relevant range of perspectives on teaching and technology relevant to bear on the issues at-hand. My efforts focus on achieving the following objectives:

1. Undertaking a critical examination of Kanuka's (2008) framework and recommendations.
2. Extending the range of both teaching and technology philosophies-in-practice under consideration.
3. Theorizing a gestalt perspective on interrelationships between teaching and technology praxes.
4. Examining four recognizable e-learning research and practice communities for associations with teaching and technology philosophies-in-practice.
5. Making a case for continued diversity in e-learning research and practice communities as an avenue to reconciliation of these virtual communities with their social, place-based environments.
6. Positing the interplay between teaching and technology philosophies-in-practice as a site for researching diverse views.

Background

More than a decade ago, Gandolfo (1998) posited the effective use of technology has "the potential to improve and enhance learning;" however:

> *Just as assuredly there is the danger that the wrong headed adoption of various technologies apart from a sound grounding in educational research and practice will result, and indeed in some instances has already resulted, in costly additions to an already expensive enterprise without any value added. That is, technology applications must be consonant with what is known about the nature of [teaching and] learning and must be assessed to ensure that they are indeed enhancing learners' experiences (p. 24).*

The increasingly ubiquitous presence of e-learning initiatives, strategies, and program offerings across institutions of higher education (HE) underpins debates around whether educational research and practice are keeping pace. Assurances that e-learning can enhance student learning via flexible access (Bates, 2005) to effective (Naylor, 2005), economical (UNESCO, 2002), up-to-date (Barone, 2003), problem-based (Jonassen, 2004), relevant (Alclay, 2003), community-oriented (Schwier, 2001, 2007; Schwier & Daniel, 2006), low-risk (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004), quality teaching and learning innovations (Garrison, Kanuka, & Hawes, 2002), that promote graduate-employability (EKOS, 2005), and internationalization (DiPaolo, 2003; Jones & Steeples, 2002), have all been linked to rationales for swift, broad-scale adoption. Despite the trend toward fast-paced, broad-ranging, and innovative e-learning adoption, over the past decade in the UK "the HE sector continued to make small gains in localized projects, but not to achieve mastery of the technology in service of its learning and teaching ambitions" (Laurillard, 2008, p. 522). Internationally, progress on e-learning acceptance and diffusion has encountered similar challenges (Bates, 2000, 2005; Nickols, 2008; Parchoma, 2008).

Over-sold e-learning claims and promises, combined with under-achieved ambitions, have led to resistance on a range of fronts. Critical educators have asked us to consider if a "technopositivist