KEEP TAKING THE TABLETS: INTEGRATING THE MOBILE IN WORK-BASED LEARNING

Abstract

This idea paper seeks to outline how existing pedagogies and the technical affordances created by mobile devices like phones and tablets can be reviewed, in light of one another, in order to profile a tool that can support work-based learning.

Universities have been involved in workforce development for more than 20 years, over which time successive governments have expressed increasingly fervent expectations that they should provide the higher level skills required by industry and the wider economy (e.g. Leitch, 2006: , Browne 2010:15-18; BIS 2011: 16). Although investment in the sector has increased the number of full time students it is clear that this cannot meet the demand for people with higher level skills on its own. The demand is too great and graduate recruitment does not address the skills of existing workforces. In addition to this the appropriateness of courses that seek to develop skills at an instrumental level can be questioned, since the skills and knowledge that they impart have such a short lifespan (Costly and Lester, 2009: 1-2). In this context universities have sought to recruit from and engage learners in the workplace and in doing so have had to grapple with the as yet unresolved question of 'what good workplace learning looks like' (Guile and Evans, 2010: 6-7).

Technology has naturally acquired a high profile in discussions about work-based learning, particularly in respect of its potential to facilitate communication between a dispersed learning community and the integration of learning and working environments. However, while research has tended to focus on informal learning as the appropriate domain for enquiry (e.g. Eraut, 2000; 2007) much practice remains focused on how technology can help mediate traditional formal learning structures (Kraiger, 2008).

In recent times this axiom has started to be eroded by an interest in mobile devices and practices based on social networking. Their relevance to the field of work-based learning is secured by observations about the unprecedented affordances that they offer the learner and their relevance to cultural practices in social and professional environments (Cook and Pachler, 2012). However, a gulf between the lessons of research and practice is asserting itself here as well. While research suggests that the value of mobile devices for learning lies in their cultural value to users and their relevance to informal learning and communication, large scale adoptions of mobile technologies by universities have focused on their potential to extend or promote access to existing uses of learning technologies. Hewegamage et al. explore this association in an article entitled ''M-learning Not an Extension of e-learning" based on a case study of Moodle VLE' in which they suggest that 'pedagogy and technical

infrastructure must be considered together…to provide a new learning service for m-learning' (ibid., 2012). The paper proposed here builds on this suggestion to explore how the affordances provided by mobile devices and a set of existing practices around self and peer assessment can be rethought in light of one another in order to create a template for a tool, in the form of a mobile app, which would support work based learning.

The pedagogical element is adapted from a set of practices called the Mexican Hat Approach, which involve self and peer assessment and were developed at Southampton Solent University in order to extend and enhance the diagnostic and formative dimensions of foundation year and undergraduate courses (Robinson et al., 2003). The idea developed in this paper derives from observations about how this model may serve to facilitate both the process and delivery of work based learning, by allowing personalisation of the curriculum, engaging the student as a self-directed learner and creating meaningful and constructive roles for mentors and other individuals based in the workplace. The idea examines how mobile technologies might be deployed within this framework, but also examines the implications of their use for the ways in which the methods of learning and teaching are formulated and implemented.

This idea will be explained in two ways: by attempting to situate the pedagogy within a body of research relating to informal, work-based and mobile learning and by providing a breakdown of how the application would operate through an analysis of use cases. Informing this discussion is input from two sources. The first involves a software architecture perspective derived from discussions with CM Group: a Bespoke Content creation provider and software development company, who pride themselves on working collaboratively with education institutions and major corporates to develop innovative learning solutions. The second comes from the Warsash Maritime Academy, one of the world's leading maritime training and education institutions, who is engaged in developing this 'idea' for an early pilot. Academic programmes in Nautical Studies and Marine Engineering consist typically of college based learning interspersed with prolonged periods of work-based learning at sea. Warsash Maritime Academy, in close collaboration with the maritime industry, is in the progress of exploring how student learning can be further enhanced during the work-based phases afloat.

References

BIS (2011) Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system, Govt. White Paper: Impact Assessment: Available: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32413/11-1050-impact-assessment-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf

Browne, J. (2010) Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education in England, available: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/hereview.independent.gov.uk/hereview/report/

Cook, J. and Pachler, N. (2012), Online people tagging: Social (mobile) network(ing) services and work-based learning. British Journal of Educational Technology, 43: 711–725.

Leitch, S.(2006) Prosperity for all in a Global Economy: World Class Skills, TSO: Norwich.

Lester, S. & Costley, C. (2010) 'Work-based learning at higher education level: value, practice and critique' Studies in Higher Education 35 (5), pp561-575

Eraut, M. (2000) 'Non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work', British Journal of Educational Psychology, 70, 1, 113–136.

Eraut, M. (2007) 'Learning from other people in the workplace', Oxford Review of Education, 33, 4, 403–422.

Evans, K., Guile, D., Harris, J., and Allan, H. (2010) 'Putting Knowledge to Work', Nurse Education Today Vol 30, 245-251.

Hewagamage, K.P et al. (2012) '"M-Learning Not an Extension of E-Learning": Based on a Case Study of Moodle VLE', Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning, vol. 4(4): 21-33.

Kraiger, K. (2008) 'Third-generation instructional models: more about guiding development and design than selecting training methods', Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 1, 4, 501–507.

Robinson, A. and Udall, M. (2003) 'Developing the independent learner: The Mexican Hat Approach, proceedings of the IEE 3rd International Symposium on Engineering Education, Southampton.