

Foreword

If one does a search for “digital identity” on Google (Sept 1st 2012), over 190,000 scholarly articles and over 1.3m online publications are returned about digital identity, ranging from federated identity management to psychological identity, which prevails in the domain of cyberspace. Those involved in education and training, whether in the compulsory sector, higher education, formal settings, and/or informal settings will know how complex and diverse learners have apparently become through having access to technologies which contribute and often dominate their lives and which enable us all to form complex and multiple identities which would not have occurred in the same way within traditional educational settings.

This new book on Digital Identities, edited by Steven Warburton and Stylianos Hatzipanagos has opened the door for the reader to a rapidly changing world in which learners no longer see themselves as experiencing an organised programme of study delivered by the lecturers, tutors, and institutions. They now have the opportunities to organise and manage their learning and social activities synchronously since the boundaries between these have mostly disappeared. The authors in this book have addressed the complexities of people having multiple identities overlapping between different types of social environments and different levels of presence in online environments. Access to IT-media has brought the existence of multiple identities to the fore and as the editors explain “we define who we are by participation and interaction.” Yet, multiple identities as explained in this book are not confined to online interactive environments but are present in individuals in different settings and social networks.

The difference between digital identities and more traditional multiple identities, before people had widespread access to online networks, is that the social milieu, reach and frequency has changed. Learners have always had social networks, whether families, pupil groups, school friends, and/or clubs, which interacted with formal learning experiences but now they have social networks in which they can adopt different persona, different levels and types of control and regulate their behaviour accordingly. They can adopt and control different forms of communication and share knowledge and learning experiences with friends and family as well as with fellow students. These different and fluid digital identities can provide new opportunities for learning, through formal organised experiences, such as using a subject domain in Second Life; or more significantly, individual learners can negotiate their learning experiences and make choices about their learning trajectories and are no longer confined to specific domains of knowledge, learning settings, or groups of learners.

The breadth and extensive coverage of this book provides important well researched evidence and guidelines for anyone involved in education, training or policy making in society. It also identifies many issues which are becoming more urgent and will affect us all in the future. How should the troubled areas of practice in higher education, such as students spending time in lectures on other social media

activities through their mobile phones or widespread plagiarism be tackled? What impact does informal learning through digital media have on formal learning and how does the lecturer compose learning activities without knowing the individual identities of their students? What strategies can be adopted to take account of these changing fluid identities and the complex relationships between them? What new technological advances will change the impact of different social identities and how will these be reconciled across different social communities, influence traditional programmes and different educational initiatives? What is the extent to which different professional networks and organisations influence this expanding range of digital identities?

This comprehensive and timely book, which tackles many of these and other important questions, provides an excellent resource both as an authoritative account of the educational, social, sociological, psychological, and technological aspects of digital identities; and as a comprehensive reference to inform any reader involved or interested in this significant and growing impact of IT technologies on local and global societies.

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