Chapter 7

Reflections on the Impact of Social Technologies on Lecturers in a Pathway Institution

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ABSTRACT

Education has evolved over time from face-to-face teaching to computer-supported learning, and now to even more sophisticated electronic tools. In particular, social technologies are being used to supplement the classroom experience and to ensure that students are becoming increasingly engaged in ways that appeal to them. No matter how educationally beneficial, however, new technology is affected by its users. To investigate this, lecturers at the Eynesbury Institute of Business and Technology (EIBT)—a Higher Education pathway provider—were surveyed to determine their perception and application of social technolog(ies) in their personal, but predominantly ‘professional’ lives. Utilising a qualitative and autoethnographic approach, one author provides an insight into their own attitude toward social technologies, coupled with responses to three open-ended questions. Thereafter, the same questions were posed to EIBT academic staff to understand their willingness or reluctance to use social technologies in their practice as part of their first-year pathway course(s).

INTRODUCTION

Educators have been using technologies for decades i.e., resources that range from ‘textbooks to overhead projectors, from typewriters in English language classrooms to charts of the periodic table on the walls of laboratories’ (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1023). Herein, ‘technology/technologies’ will refer to artefacts and tools of the Web 2.0 era and beyond. The ‘information age’ is characterised by the diffusion of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and
an increased demand for educational approaches that foster ‘lifelong learning’ (Fischer & Konomi, 2007). Slaoti, Motteram and Onat-Stelma (2013, p. 78) referred to this phenomenon as the ‘technologification’ of [adult] learning. As far back as Laurillard (1993), there was a desire to make greater use of the affordances of new technologies, which has since expanded exponentially as the physical terrain of study itself has become increasingly digital (Beard & Dale, 2010). Emerging social technologies offer new opportunities, otherwise referred to as ‘participatory media’ and/or ‘relationship technologies’ (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009). In the present landscape of Higher Education (HE) and technological change, important transformations are underway in terms of how students study.

**BACKGROUND**

**Eynesbury Institute of Business and Technology**

The Eynesbury Institute of Business and Technology (EIBT) is one of a growing number of private providers linking up with partner universities to establish programs that aim to improve the academic performance and language skills of international students and simultaneously create opportunities to promote Australian HE in a global market. EIBT students are almost exclusively international and the main objective is to secure their tertiary destination prior to them meeting entry requirements. EIBT aims to matriculate international students to ‘target’ institutions (Martin, 2014, p. 5) by offering diplomas that comprise the exact same courses that constitute the first-year of a bachelor degree in Business, Information Technology or Engineering at the University of Adelaide or the University of South Australia.

Though EIBT is accessible to local students, recruitment is predominantly directed towards full fee-paying international students who:

1. Have completed Year 11 high school in Australia and would prefer to continue their studies in a different academic context;
2. Have completed Year 12 high school in Australia, but did not obtain an ATAR [Australian Tertiary Admission Rank] sufficient for direct entry into university;
3. Have graduated from high school abroad, but whose English language proficiency did not meet the minimum requirement for direct entry into university; or
4. Are above 20 years of age with a relevant employment history.

EIBT diploma programs benefit from the discipline-specific expertise and academic rigour the universities apply to their own curriculum (Velliaris & Willis, 2014). Cross-institutional lecturers—PhD candidates, experienced academics and/or business professionals—deliver approximately 40 courses across three back-to-back trimesters. The pathway university moderates diploma delivery and grants advanced standing for courses if students achieve the minimum entry-level score upon graduation.

**Impact of Social Technologies**

In a seminal article, Putnam (1995) documented a broad decline in civic engagement and social participation in the United States (US) over a 35 year period, and also argued that social disengagement was affecting individual lives and the social fabric of the US at two levels. First, at the individual level, disengagement was contributing to a poorer quality of life and diminished physical and psychological health. That is, when people