Chapter 13
The Evolution of Pedagogy for Non-Traditional Students at a UK Higher Education Institution

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ABSTRACT

The chapter will critically examine the evolution of pedagogy from a traditional ‘blended learning’ approach driven by classroom teaching with some virtual activities, to a more student driven learning experience, where the classroom activities support the learning experience. It will include the use of the ‘carpe diem’ framework (Armellini & Jones, 2008) as part of a challenge to the original pedagogic approach of teacher-led learning, and the move to a student-centred pedagogy, which is more inclusive of learning technologies and the unique challenges faced by work-based learning students. This chapter will offer a critical interrogation of the relationship between the notions of traditional teaching and higher education students, with emerging learning and teaching innovations for work-based students via more rounded understanding of blended learning and will conclude that knowledge and support of the diversity of staff and student experience, skills, motivations and capabilities is critical to sustainable and effective student-led, technologically rich approaches for this diverse group of students.

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical approaches to understanding student learning in higher education reveals paradoxical ideas about 21st century learning, student participation and learning technology. There is a widening participation agenda in UK higher education, and students from backgrounds not traditionally associated with higher education are faced with a range of academic experiences, with ‘cybertopians’ celebrating the burgeoning use of technology in higher education and ‘cybercritics’ raising fears that technology is putting the quality of student learning at risk as students are overwhelmed by a plethora of information and activities, lack the necessary skills to lead their own learning, and to discern what is sound academic evidence. These contrasting interpretations are both problematic as they essentialise approaches
to student learning, denying the increasing diversity of higher education students, learning styles and environments, resting upon technological determinist understandings of the inevitable positive impact technology has upon education practices.

There is a growing awareness in UK higher education institutions of the need to meet the demands of the diverse nature of students entering higher education (HEFCE, 2013), such as those on work-based learning courses. Alongside this, the growing use of technology in higher education is also under greater scrutiny, with the UCISA (2014) ‘Survey of Technology Enhanced Learning for Higher Education in the UK’ highlighting that mobile learning and technologies are ranked highest among respondents as posing the most challenges in term of support for staff and students. The development of teaching and learning with emerging technologies is often seen as the preserve of ‘the few’, and emerging technologies can be viewed as a means for increased workload and responsibilities for academic staff (JISC, 2010). The case study outlined in this chapter will be considered in relation to the existing literature on technology enhanced learning and pedagogical approaches related to widening participation in higher education, alongside theoretical perspectives to understanding learning in a divergent media rich learning and work environment. This includes an examination of student led teaching and learning as it is currently offered, with prime drivers being simplicity, intelligent use of learning time, support for work based students, and effective integration of emerging technologies.

A case study will form the basis for a discussion of technology enhanced blended learning, a term which has been applied to the current curriculum design, to critically examine the notion of a blended learning approach. Whilst ubiquitous throughout higher education, there is disagreement as to what blended learning actually is (Sharpe et al, 2006), yet this has not prevented its progress as a catch-all term. Much of the discussion about what blended learning is has centred on what it is that is being blended, and far from being problematic, the apparent lack of agreement has been lauded by some (Driscoll, 2003). The chapter will critically examine the evolution of pedagogy from a traditional ‘blended learning’ approach driven by classroom teaching with some virtual activities, to a more student driven learning experience, where the classroom activities support the learning experience. The case study will include the use of the ‘carpe diem’ framework (Armellini & Jones, 2008) as part of a challenge to the original pedagogic approach of teacher-led learning, and the move to a student-centred pedagogy, which is more inclusive of learning technologies and the unique challenges faced by work based learning students. Examples from the case study will be used to base the discussion upon.

This chapter will offer a critical interrogation of the relationship between the notions of traditional teaching and higher education students, with emerging learning and teaching innovations for work based students via more rounded understanding of blended learning. The chapter will conclude that knowledge and support of the diversity of staff and student experience, skills, motivations and capabilities is critical to developing, supporting and promoting sustainable and effective student-led, technologically rich approaches for this diverse group of students.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

An expanding and responsive post compulsory education sector has been high on the agenda of UK governments over the last 20 years, with a focus on new funding mechanisms, courses that are responsive to the needs of industry, and greater participation for those who may benefit from higher education. A vital component of this is the ‘widening participation’ movement, which refers to increasing the number of