Chapter 18

Personalisation and the Online Video Narrative Learning Tools V-ResORT and the ViP

Gordon Joyes
University of Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes two tools for personalised learning that were outcomes of projects led by the author for use in educational settings. These are the Virtual Resources for Online Research Training (V-ResORT) and the Virtual Interactive Platform (ViP) learning tools. The former was designed to support post graduate research students to develop an understanding of educational research through an exploration of researcher video narratives. The latter was designed to support online communities in sharing and critiquing videos of practice. These tools support the development of a learner identity characterized by proactive participation in construction and reconstruction of knowledge rather than pure consumption. This involves an engagement with communities of practice which it is argued is central to personalised learning.

INTRODUCTION

The Virtual Resources for Online Research Training (V-ResORT) and the Virtual Interactive Platform (ViP) learning tools are described in the following. These use online video in quite different ways though their intentions are the same; to engage learners with communities of practice. Their origins arise from a reconceptualisation of personalisation and some re-thinking about what might be termed a personalised tool for learning. These considerations present the rationale for the design of the tools and as such are an important starting point for the chapter.

Dede (2007) states that “Our ways of thinking and knowing, teaching and learning are undergoing a sea change, and what is emerging seems both rich and strange” (p.25). New technologies offer the potential to change the nature of learner identity and are already doing so, particularly in lifelong learning contexts. For educationalists (policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, lecturers, mentors and researchers) new technologies bring

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with them a wake up call to focus on the skills and competences required by learners in a globalised knowledge rich environment (Laurillard, 2007). The curriculum needs to support learners in adopting new modes of learning which may seem strange in formal educational settings, but which may seem natural and common place in informal social networking ones. Online learning brings with it the potential for not only student-centred leaning but an engagement with networks or communities as part of the curriculum. In this context of supporting the forming of new identities for learners, notions of what is meant by personalisation need to be rethought. Recent research into UK school student expectations of university and use of new technologies in order to inform Higher Education indicate that traditional approaches to teaching and learning such as face-to-face lecture and seminars predominate their thinking. This JISC (2007) report states that “they are excited by technological options which they imagine will assist and complement their studies, but not by ones which they imagine will complicate or inhibit them, or take them out of their comfort zones with regard to teaching and learning” (p.29). There are issues to be addressed in relation to learner support and induction when engaging any learner in new and strange pedagogic approaches and new technologies can add a further potentially troublesome dimension. Simply making technologies available themselves will not result in changes in learner identity. However this chapter argues that technologies carefully designed with clear pedagogic purposes in mind can engage learners in developing new understandings of their roles as learners and prepare them for their roles as lifelong learners. These tools for learning can act as enablers of new approaches to learning.

The term tool for learning is used within the chapter and a distinction is made between a resource and a tool. Beetham (2007) states that “resources are content based artefacts that use various representational media such as text, images, moving images and sound” (p. 33). The Vygotskian perspective is that tools play a meditational role in the construction of knowledge; a change in tool has the potential to change the structure of a learning activity (Vygotsky, 1981). In this chapter it is argued that online resources when combined with pedagogic features such as powerful navigation, suggested learning pathways, opportunities to upload resources and make meaning of them etc. constitute tools for learning. Tools for personalised learning have a conscious pedagogic intent in their design.

The chapter provides the rationale for the design of the V-ResORT and the ViP tools that use video narratives as a pedagogic device. V-ResORT is described together with the action research development and evaluation process. Some strengths and limitations of V-ResORT are then discussed. The ViP is introduced and contrasted with V-ResORT. The ViP evaluation projects that are underway are then described and these provide an insight into the ways this is being used to mediate or shape learner identity within communities of practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion of future research and an invitation for partners to be involved in ViP research projects.

PERSONALISED TOOLS FOR LEARNING

Issues, Controversies, Problems: Defining Personalised Learning

Definitions of personalised learning emphasise the need to move from the world of the teacher to the world of the learner in designing learning. Ravenscroft & Cook (2007) state that “personalisation and learner-centredness mean starting from the learner’s own devices, preferences and behaviours” (p. 213). In addition:

The logic of education systems should be reversed so that it is the system that conforms to the learner, rather than the learner to the system. This is the
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