Ownership of Technology-enhanced Learning- An Argument

Zorah Abu Kassim

Open University Malaysia, Business School ◆ Malaysia ◆ zorah_abukassim@oum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This paper argues for learners now have ownership of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) as supported by literature. The literature reviewed gives arguments in favour of ownership of technology enhanced learning (TEL) now are the responsibility of learners. The paper also draws some important implications for practitioners in the teaching and learning context. Insights gathered support the implications in the context of teaching and learning in an ODL environment.

INTRODUCTION

The statement that learners now have ownership of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) can be supported or refuted. The interpretation of "ownership" is in the broadest sense beyond ownership of devices to mean responsibility of using technologies to enhance learning lies with the learners. In this sense, the learner needs to know the benefits derived from using technologies to enhance their own learning. More ever, this assumes that learners know how to use such technologies to improve their learning. Furthermore, this implies that tutor's role is mainly that of support and as a facilitator in the process of learning. Thus, the responsibility of learning lies with learners having to use technologies to enhance their own learning. This paper forwards the argument for learners now have ownership of technology-enhanced learning.

Learners Now Have Ownership of Technology–Enhanced Learning

One of the arguments for learners now has ownership of technology can be due to increasing use of technologies Web 2.0. Weller (2011) argues that the impact of technologies using Web 2.0 allows for engaging activities that are playful, expressive, reflective or exploratory. He further states that a myriad of sources for TEL such as the use of eBooks, eJournals, Delicious and Social bookmarking sites, blogs, YouTube, Wikipedia, Slideshares and Cloudworks are available to enhance learning. Therefore, the quantity of information has increased tremendously (Weller, 2011) outside that of textbooks and teachers. A learner is able to draw resources from a wide pool of alternatives for example, by following Twitters and blogs. For example, blogging is easy to set up, use and within the control of the user with no word limit. Blogging, can therefore, allow the learner to express freely their views on any subject (Weller, 2011). Increasingly, the role of social network such as Twitter and Google alerts allows for a peer network

system based on scholarly practice enabling a discussion of ideas and getting feedback. As such learners can take advantage of the social media (either in text, audio or video) to get a discussion going or to obtain feedback outside the classroom setting. More importantly, such technologies allow for "a culture of openness" that is digitalizing meaning that contents can be shared among learners without cost and accessibility is global (Weller, 2011). This "culture of openness" allows for learners to be accessible worldwide. Furthermore, Weller (2011) argues that of "technology determinism" in which technology plays a significant role in how people are communicating, constructing knowledge and socializing. An important implication of this are the uses of technologies outside the control of the institution such as universities or schools implying that a weakening of links between teachers and their institutional base. As such, learners have the autonomy to decide for themselves the choice and usage of such technologies to enhance their learning without having to rely on the teacher. Hence, changes from traditional practices from teacher-led to student-led.

Another argument in favour of learners now has ownership of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) can be due to the blurring of formal and informal learning that takes place. For example, in the use of mobile technologies in learning, evidence have indicated that there is a merging of formal activity and the "personal thing" (Pettit and Kukulska-Hulme, 2011). In their study of mobile technologies, benefits derived from using mobiles were articulated such as capturing ideas almost instantaneously and portability of mobiles leading to accessibility to information anywhere (Petit and Kukulska-Hulme, 2011). Such benefits allow learners to access information outside the university setting to the learner's convenience. Mobile 2.0/Web 2.0 technologies, involves activities that many learners are already engaged in for pleasure. Hence, they present rich opportunities for students to contribute to their own and other's learning (Pettit and Kukulska-Hulme, 2011) as mobile devices are highly attractive and are woven into daily lives of students. Ultimately, this leads to increasing motivation to learn, at times and in places that suit the learner (Pettit and Kulska-Hulme, 2011). Evidence further suggests that mobile devices are shown to support informal and community learning (Kukulska-Hulme, et. al, 2011) such as enabling learners to create their own resources ,write blogs to keep updated with their friends on events, take and distribute photos and videos, make and take notes and do recordings. The ability of Mobile 2.0 technologies also, allows for learners to have instant and permanent documentation of notes, suitable for auditory learners by use of podcasts and taking photos of overhead slides (Kukulska-Hulme et.al. 2011), to name a few. Many of the benefits of adopting Mobile 2.0 technologies, therefore, give the responsibility of using such a technology to enhance learning to the learners. Furthermore, in their study (Kukulska-Hulme, et. al, 2011) learners are finding multiple pathways in terms of using such technologies to achieve learning outcomes in their studies. Mobile technology is a good example of a type of TEL in which learners decide for themselves the choice of technology they want to use that is appropriate in their context. Furthermore, TEL encourages the constructivist approach to learning through empowering students to collaborate to find their own resources and connections (Thorpe, 2008). Moreover, the use of TEL such as podcasts suits auditory learners and allows for cultural diversity among students. Cultural diversity can imply that TEL allows for accommodation of different types of learning cultures. For example, learning cultures that are not text-based or "non-reading cultures" can benefit by using technologies such as using YouTube videos to information across to learners. TEL helps learners with learning disabilities as listening of recording of lectures can be combined with daily activities (Kukulska-Hulme, et. al, 2011).

It can be argued that learners construct knowledge as in terms of Wenger's (2007) "communities of practice". Learners are part of a community which produces knowledge and the quality of community that a learner belongs to makes the difference to the quality of knowledge that is produced. Knowledge produced is open for peer review. A good example is Wikipedia. This practice of engagement like an exchange of ideas contributes to knowledge (Wenger, 2007) and therefore, TEL allows for engagement among learners to happen easily. A person can check on postings in an online forum as part of a community and even though, he may not be actively posting, that does not mean there is a not meaningful connection to the process of learning. The learner forms an identity with his community (Wenger, 2007). In some cases, because of learning is based on TEL practices for communication for example, the learner forms a professional identity. TEL practices allow the learner to cross boundaries; boundaries between learners in different geographic regions or between management and workers (Wenger, 2007) for instance.

Important Implications to Practitioners

One of the most implications to practitioners is a change in practice from the tradition of being teacher-led to the empowerment of learning to students. This means that the role of the teacher changes from the "Expert" or "Sage on Stage" to that of being a facilitator or an advisor. There is recognition that students learn through collaboration, to find their own resources and to construct complex personal understandings (Thorpe, 2008). Therefore, pedagogical framework needs to change to encourage participation from students. One way of pedagogical change is for practitioners to develop interventions to improve the way practitioners design learning. The success of interventions depends on usability and contextualization which involves customizing or adapting of resources for an intended audience. This involves the idea of professional learning in which practitioners have to reconstruct their learning and teaching. More importantly, learning design is to support practitioner's to base their practice on an understanding of students learning (deFreitas, et.al, 2007). Learning design involves not only a narrative description of learning outcomes to be achieved but a visual representation of tasks, activities and resources required including the inputs from the tutor. Beetham and Sharpe (2007) argues that pedagogy in a learner-centered environment, has the meaning of leading or guiding to learn. Hence, focus on the learner not on the teacher. Web 2.0 technologies causes the need for learning design to be intentional, obvious and pressing (Beetham and Sharpe, 2007). There is need for pedagogical activities to have forethought and an explicit representation of what learners and teachers do. Hence, practitioners need to give clear guidelines on instructions and clarification needs to be given to learners (Hara and Kling, 1999). The practitioner needs to be clear on the expectations of learners so that little ambiguity exists on how assessments are graded (Hara and Kling, 1999).

Practitioners, also, have to consider other factors in learning design such as quality assurance processes and professionalism in teaching that can result in a formal approach to design. "Design" in the form of lesson plans, module validation documents and pro-forma are evidences of documentation in quality assurance. Practitioners have to consider economic pressures and larger class sizes which have resulted to increasingly important and effective pedagogical approaches be shared and re-used. This is to off-set the investment of time and expertise that has gone into their development (Beetham and Sharpe, 2007). In terms of my own practice, due to a hectic tri-semesters system implemented in my university, time and resources are constraints in the preparation for a design for learning. However, the university's administration allows for many lecturers to teach the same subject/s yearly. This facilitates some thought or reflections being put into

the processes of a learning design. Furthermore, Beetham and Sharpe (2007) argue that digital technologies offer a new context for learning and teaching for practitioners. For example, knowledge now is often bias towards representations in digital forms (Beetham and Sharpe, 2007). Students own personal mobiles, personal computers, PDA's besides the use of personal websites, blogs and Wikis to name a few. As such due to the accessibility of such networks, this has changed learning to be refigured as the acquisition of information skills such as literacy, numeracy, adaptability, problem solving and communication. Such acquisitions of skills are due to getting learners to be prepared for work in a new information age (Beetham and Sharpe, 2007). Therefore, there is increasing pressure on practitioners to develop expertise in the design of activities that delivers the learning potential of particular technologies. Teachers need to respond critically and creatively to new technologies and cannot afford to ignore such technologies if they want to engage with their learners (Beetham and Sharpe, 2007). In my own teaching practice, student's access to mobiles and the Internet has made me reflect on how I could creatively design my course syllabus to include the usage of Web 2.0 technologies within the institutional context of a learning management system or virtual learning system (VLE). My university's VLE are confined to the use of online forums, submission of assignments online, iVideos of lectures and iFeed, a FAQ system. However, I have found that many students are using Web 2.0 technologies beyond the university VLE. Learners are using social media for example, Facebook, instant messaging and Twitter to communicate and collaborate with one another in regards to their studies.

Practitioners have to consider that learners will use the Internet because it is convenient rather than because it gives accurate information (Haythornthwaite, 2008). Vetting of the information still lies with the user. Haythornwaite (2008) describes that participatory learning will be the norm and that practitioners needs to give leadership and control to learners, hence, co-learning pedagogy which means transfer of knowledge from one to many (example, instructor to students, and exchange of knowledge among many (students to students) and from the transfer of the expert to the novice in a collaborative peer-to peer learning and discovery (Haythornwaite, 2008). Practitioners need to review on how to increase participation online and compensate for reduced cues (such as physical cues, for example, facial expressions) of the online environment (Haythornwaite, 2008). Practitioners have to think on strategies to for example, co-opting and integrating the use of laptops into daily practice for example, disseminating lecture materials to laptops for enhanced note taking, or involving students in class in searching or other online exercises (Haythornwaite, 2008). Usually, I would allow my students to use their laptops and mobiles for online searching of information in class. I don't consider it conflicting for students to be browsing on their laptops or mobiles in lectures as I have usually posted the PowerPoint Slides for subsequent lectures on the university VLE. From my experience, many students still do attend the lectures face-to-face regularly because students find that the PowerPoint Slides inadequate for the subject matter. Furthermore, as emphasized by Anderson (2003), because of the changing roles of the teacher, teachers need professional development and knowledge building opportunities throughout their careers (Anderson, 2003)..

CONCLUSION

I will conclude that Web 2.0 technologies have changed the face of teaching and learning among learners and practitioners. In developing countries, the prospects of the use of

Web 2.0 technologies are bright. Ironically, basic infrastructure such as accessibility and speed of the Internet is an issue especially to learners in the less developed areas or hinterlands of a country where education of the local population is of primary concern.

REFERENCES

Anderson, T. (2003) Getting the mix right again: an updated and theoretical rationale for interaction, *International review of research in open and distance learning*, vol.4, no.2; also available online at http://www.irrodl.org/ index.php/ irrodl/ article/view/ 149 (last accessed 5 August 2014).

Beetham, H. and Sharpe, R. (2007) , An introduction to rethinking pedagogy for a digital age in Beetham, H. and Sharpe, R. (eds) *Rethinking pedagogy for a digital age: Designing and delivering e-learning*, Abingdon, Routledge

de Freitas, S., Oliver, M., Mee, A. and Mayes, T. (2009), The practitioner perspective on the modelling of pedagogy and practice, *Journal of computer assisted learning*, vol.24, pp.26–38; also available online at http://libezproxy.open.ac.uk/login? url=http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1111/ j.1365-2729.2007.00241.x (last accessed 7 July 2014).

Hara, N. & Kling, R. (1999). Student's frustration with a web-based distance education course. *FirstMonday*, Vol. 4(12); also available online at http://www.firstmonday. dk/issues/issue4_12/hara/index.html (last accessed August 20, 2013)

Haythornthwaite, C. (2008),Ubiquitous transformations, Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Networked Learning, Halkidiki, Greece, 4–7 May 2008; also available online at http://www.networkedlearningconference.org.uk/ past/ nlc2008/ abstracts/ PDFs/ Haythornthwaite_598-605.pdf (last accessed August 1 2014).

Kukulska-Hulme, A., Pettit, J., Bradley, L., Carvalho, A.A., Herrington, A., Kennedy, D. and Walker, A. (2011) , Mature students using mobile devices in life and learning, *International journal of mobile and blended learning*, Vol.3, no.1, pp.18–52; also available online at http://libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ login?url=http://dx.doi.org/ 10.4018/ jmbl.2011010102 (last accessed 28 July 2014).

Pettit, J. (2014), Partly self-made niches? Student-only spaces in an LMS', *Australasian journal of educational technology*, vol.30, no.1, pp.16–30; available online at http://oro.open.ac.uk/ 39876/ (last accessed 20 July 2014).

Pettit, J. and Kukulska-Hulme, A. (2011),Mobile 2.0: crossing the border into formal learning? in Lee, M.J.W. and McLoughlin, C. (eds) *Web 2.0-based e-learning: Applying social informatics for tertiary teaching*, Hershey, PA, IGI Global; also available online at http://www.igi-global.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ gateway/ contentowned/ chapter.aspx?titleid=45023&accesstype=infosci (last accessed 11 July 2014).

Thorpe, M. (2008), Effective online interaction: mapping course design to bridge from research to practice, *Australasian journal of educational technology*, vol.24, no.1, pp.57–72; also available online at http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ehost/mpdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=0bec5f9a-c6a6-41ff-833b33d44bccc a0b%40sessionmgr4001&hid=4113 (last accessed July 2, 2014).

Weller, M. (2011) *The digital scholar: How technology is transforming scholarly practice*, London, Bloomsbury Academic; also available online at http://www.bloomsburyacademic.com/ view/ DigitalScholar_9781849666275/ chapter-ba-9781849666275-chapter-001.xml (last accessed 1July 2014).

Wenger, E. (2007), Practice-based Professional Learning: Session 1, presentation to Practice-based Professional Learning Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK; 11 December.