Who helps an online facilitator to learn with students in a day?

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This article draws on a case study of one facilitator with eight postgraduate students who uses online resources in teaching a Curriculum module at one of the universities in South Africa. The facilitator uses an online chat, discussion forum, blogs and Facebook to learn with his students in a form of blended learning. This article does not only give this facilitator and his students a voice but it also encourages them to reflect from their experiences in the teaching and learning of this module. The facilitator claimed to be using these online resources in promoting active students because his students had to learn with these online resources as opposed to learning from these online resources. A guided analysis theory was used as a framework for data production and this produced four themes for presenting the findings, while this article itself is framed by Entertainment Education theory. Online document analysis, observation and semi-structured interviews were used for data generation. This article prioritises the facilitator's claim that students should learn with resources. The article concludes that Coincidental Learning was utilised for this module. Therefore, the article is proposing the utilisation of Awareness Learning in the teaching and learning of this Curriculum module.

Introduction

Any person or thing that communicates learning becomes a teaching and learning resource. Online teaching and learning resources like off-line teaching and learning resources are divided into Technology in Education (TIE) and Technology of Education (TOE) (Percival & Ellington, 1988). TIE is any teaching / learning resource that one can see and touch. TOE is any teaching / learning resource that one cannot see and touch.

TIE is further divided into hardware and software. Hardware is any machine or tool used in teaching and learning but in terms of online teaching and learning they are used to access the internet (e.g. desktop computers, laptops, cellular phone and others). Hardware is the same for both online and off-line contexts. Software is any material that is produced for the hardware to display information or communicate learning (e.g. for off-line transparencies for Overhead Projector or for online PowerPoint slides and others).

This suggests that while the hardware component is the same for both the online and off-line teaching and learning, the software component is not directly the same. For example, one can see and touch the transparencies but one can only see the PowerPoint slides but cannot touch them unless one prints them. This means that almost all online software resources are different from the off-line version because one can see them but one can only touch them if they are reproduced as a hard copy. On the other hand almost all the off-line software components come in the form of hard copies.

TOE, also known as 'ideological-ware' of teaching and learning resources, are almost the same for

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both the online and off-line contexts (e.g. teaching / learning strategies, theories of teaching / learning, research findings, experiences and others). In both the online and off-line contexts, one cannot see and touch these TOE resources.

Therefore, the next section will be opening a discourse around the four commonly used online teaching and learning resources. These online resources are discussed under TIE and TOE. Although both the TOE and TIE online teaching and learning resources are discussed, TIE is only discussed as a software component because almost all the commonly used online teaching and learning resources come from this software component. Even though the hardware components such as computers, digital cameras and the like are important in teaching and learning, this study goes beyond the hardware and concentrates on the software component of TIE and TOE (ideological-ware).

Four popular online teaching and learning resources (tools)

Online synchronous discussion (**Online chat**) is an online resource or tool used to conduct a real time discussion from different locations, the same location or from both of these conditions. According to Holmes and Gardner (2006) online chat promotes effective interaction and collaboration between students as well as between students and their facilitators. A study conducted by Bowler (2009) concludes that students enjoy the use of online chat in learning because their queries are answered quickly and those who are shy to contribute in the face-to-face discussion can contribute and participate in the online chat. As much as they enjoy the online chat they do not want it to replace the face-to-face discussion which has more social elements than the online chat. However, the same study reveals that the online chat is not effective if one has large groups. This suggests that online chat should only support face-to-face activities instead of trying to replace them because face-to-face discussion is not affected by the size of groups. As a result Lytras, Gasevic, De Pablos and Huang (2008) believe that online chat has to enhance face-to-face discussions.

Online asynchronous discussion (**Discussion forum**) is an online resource or tool used to conduct threaded discussion (not real time) from different locations or the same location. A study conducted by Macdonald (2006, p.47) concludes that online discussion "'presents opportunities to develop independent self-directed learners". Facilitators need to build students' confidence because "learning online requires students to study more independently than they may previously have been used to" (Macdonald, 2006, p.115). This suggests that facilitators have a long way to go in preparing students for online discussion. This may include using emails so that students become familiar with online discussion environments because emails work in a similar way as the online discussion.

Facebook is one of the Web 2.0 resources which was extended to anyone who wanted to used it in September 2006, after it "was created in February 2004" for Ivy League University students by Mark Zuckerberg at Harvard University" (Ivala & Gachago, 2012, p.153). Facebook is a platform used by internet users to create a simple and friendly webpage. When they design these webpages it is not necessary for them to understand any internet programming language like HTML because they do not use any language. A study by Ivala and Gachago (2012, p.164) concludes by indicating that "Facebook enhanced by cell phones, should be utilised in higher education to promote student interaction and greater engagement with learning materials". This suggests that Facebook is important in teaching and learning if it promotes interaction and student engagement which is becoming the backbone of any student-centred learning environment. This becomes possible when considering that most students have cell phones today to access the internet. Therefore, Facebook can enhance students' means of communication and their identities.

Online Web Logs are called Blogs. Web Logging is called blogging and a person who uses the

blogs is called a blogger. The **Blogs** are also one of the Web 2.0 resources used by the internet users to create webpages without any understanding of internet programming language. In most cases they work as an online reflective journal when blog users present activities that reflect on their experiences. The study by Ivala and Gachago (2012, p.163) recommends that "lecturers should embed the use of Facebook and blogs in their teaching into the larger curricular framework and not see the use of technology as another tool to fit into an already full curriculum". This suggest that these online resources (TIE) should combined well with TOE in order to promote learning because learning is not only about TIE but it is about both TIE (hardware & software) and TOE (ideological-ware).

Theoretical lens or framework

Most of the online teaching and learning resources are used for both entertainment and education purposes. Students even identify themselves as other famous people whom they like. As a result Entertainment-Education Theory (EET) was used to frame this study. Singhal and Rogers (1999, p.xii) state that "Entertainment-education is the process of purposely designing a media message to both entertain and educate", in order to increase the student's knowledge, about an educational activity, "create favourable attitudes and change overt behaviour". Mateas and Lewis (1999) argue that any line that separates learning and play has to be blurred so that play and work are viewed as being an integral part of the learning process. According to Moyer-Guse (2008, p.408) EET has certain important constructs that need to be considered in terms of following EET message. The constructs are "identification, wishful identification, parasocial interaction (PSI) or liking, similarity and transportation".

Identification is when a student takes another person's position in order to learn from the person's perspective. Students in this state forget their reality and image themselves as other important people and enjoy usage of different online teaching and learning resources (Cohen, 2001). Identification is popular when students are working on Facebook, Blogs, online chat and discussion forums. According to Moyer-Guse identification involves the cognitive and emotional parts of the students, whereas Cohen (2001) suggests that it involves cognitive, motivational, empathic and absorption parts of the students. While these online resources are mostly designed for teaching and learning they mostly bring the element of entertainment where the students can socialize with their friends. Therefore, the environment encourages identification where students create electronic mails (emails) using false identification in order to access other people's Facebook pages or Blogs. They also use search engines to search and download videos from YouTube and get absorbed by this information and identify themselves with the new, ideal, good people of their imaginations (cognitively, emotionally, empathically & socially).

Wishful identification is when students are trying to imitate certain people of their choice but not trying to become like them as in the case of identification. It is only a desire to be like those people without changing their own identities or reality (Moyer-Guse, 2001).

Parasocial interaction (PSI) or liking refers to a situation where students identify powerful people in their field of study and socialize with them. Students even connect their Facebook page or Blogs to these powerful people in their field. When they do this they develop certain features that are similar to those of these powerful people.

Similarity, according to Moyer-Guse (2008, p.410), "refers to the degree to which [a student] perceives that he or she is similar to a [powerful person in his / her field of study]". In other words students identify their own qualities that are similar to other powerful people in their field of study which may lead to the identification construct (Cohen, 2001).

Transportation refers to a situation where students are absorbed into their entertainment or learning activities in such a way that they accept anything from their ideal specialists in their field of study or from their courses without any counterargument (Knowles & Linn, 2004). It shares some similar elements with identification.

Research objective and research questions

This article intended to explore the use of the four popular online teaching and learning resources (online chat, discussion forum, Facebook and Blogs) used by a university facilitator to teach a curriculum studies module with the aim of understanding how and why these resources were being used by both the facilitator and students, framed by Entertainment Education theory. This article may help higher education institutions answer the question of 'who helps an online facilitator to learn with students in a day?' One possible answer to this is: 'I the online chat, I the online discussion forum, I the Facebook and I the Blog'.

The data production was organised to respond to the following research question:
- Who helps an online facilitator to learn with students in a day?
- How do they help in learning with students?
- Why do they help in learning with students?

Research design and Methodology

This is an interpretive qualitative case study of one university lecturer (facilitator) and eight students from one of the universities in South Africa. The interpretive qualitative approach is important for this study because it is more descriptive, holistic, explorative and contextual in its design and aims to produce rich descriptions of investigated phenomena (Creswell, 1994). For this study qualitative case-studies have helped to understand the deeper meaning of the facilitator's and students' experiences and challenges through their use of online teaching and learning resources in teaching and learning their curriculum module.

Sampling

Participants of this study consist of one most accessible Curriculum Studies lecturer (facilitator) with his most accessible eight postgraduate students from one of the universities in South Africa (Convenience sampling). The study focussed on the experiences of this Curriculum Studies lecturer with his eight most accessible students out of eighteen students in his class that use the four popular online teaching and learning resources for teaching and learning the Curriculum Studies module. The researcher is also from the same discipline (Curriculum Studies). This means that both purposive and convenience sampling were used in selecting the most accessible group that use the four most popular online resources. Purposive is suitable for this study because this group has rich data in terms of the topic and this study does not intend to generalise (Christiansen, Bertram & Land, 2010). The eight participants were given new names for the purpose of ethical considerations as suggested by Rand Afrikaans University (2002). The new name for the lecturer is F1 and the new names for the students are from P1 to P8 because they were eight in number in a class of eighteen students. Informed consent and ethical considerations were acquired in terms of confidentiality, voluntary participation and anonymity as per Rand Afrikaans University (2002) principles of ethics.

Data generation and data analysis

Instruments used in this study for data generation were the facilitator's online module space analysis (online document analysis), participant observation and individual semi-structured interviews. The three instruments were used for the purpose of triangulation of data to achieve a

measure of trustworthiness (Krefting, 1991). Observation was done once (one lesson for 2 hours) of the facilitator together with his students. Observation of the facilitator's online module space analysis was conducted four times for about two hours per session. Interviews were conducted after observations for a maximum of thirty minutes per participant. An audio-tape was used to record the interviews for ease of transcription. In terms of data analysis this study used guided analysis where the researcher had categories that can be modified through interaction with the data (Samuel, 2009). The findings are exploratory in nature: four online resources as themes were generated from the data with EET principles (Moyer-Guse, 2008) and followed by discussion and conclusion with recommendations.

Findings

Findings are presented under each theme in some cases by means of direct quotations and substantiated with discussions to re-contextualise them within the relevant literature.

Who is the first one to learn with the students? I, the Online Chat!

The first fifteen minutes for the two hour lesson started with online chat. All eighteen students with their facilitator start the lesson by logging in to the online chat for fifteen minutes. Five students were not in the same venue with the other thirteen students who were in the classroom for the module. The facilitator was in his office asking the students some questions. The first statement / question from the facilitator (F1): '*Welcome to the module today, are you all in and well?*' Most of them responded and said '*Thank you sir / Doc we are all in and well*'. P1 who was one of the fifteen students in the classroom added to the students' responses and said '*as you can see our names on the screen'*. F1 said '*I mean physical…*'. P8 who was not in the classroom said '*I am in Doc but I am not well because of the traffic in front of me, as a result I had to join the chat session through my BlackBerry cell phone but I will be there by 16h15*'. P2's second message said '*at what time are we leaving today Doc?*'. F1 said '*Ok P8 but @P2 I don't have an answer to your question, yet, why do you ask?*'. P3's second statement '*Sir its P2's birthday today but her boyfriend did not buy anything for her, can you please buy a cake for her?*'. F1 said '*sorry to hear that, but why me?*'. P1's third statement said '*Doc has to look after his beau…wife so that P2 will come to me and leave her boyfriend…*'. F1 said '*enough about your friends now, did you all prepare your PowerPoint presentation on CAPS and Activity Theory?*'.

F1 had to send this statement / question five times (same statement / question after every minute) before the students started to respond to it because they were responding to one another's statements or questions. Only four of them responded to the facilitator's statements or questions. After fourteen minutes of this chat activity the facilitator's name disappeared from the screen while the students were not aware and he appeared physically in the classroom to students and asked '*who is presenting first today*?'. Students did not have answers to this question because most of them were still preparing the PowerPoint presentations parallel to the chat activity. They were supposed to upload / post their PowerPoint presentations to the discussion forum before they come to the module classroom but only eight presentations were ready on the discussion forum (the eight students with presentations became the eight participants). It was interesting to see that each of the eighteen students had at least four posts (statements / questions) on the online chat space by the end of fifteen minutes.

F1 indicated that he uses the online chat to break the ice or keep his students relaxed by taking away any fear of his presence from his students, reminding the students about the lesson activity for the day and to mark the register. The following list is a summary of what came out of the online chat:
- All students participated, even shy students were communicating with the facilitator freely but when he appeared in the classroom they became shy again;

- All students wanted the facilitator's attention, they even send social issues to get the facilitator's attention;
- Other students pretended as if they were participating by sending their comments on the chat while they were busy preparing their PowerPoint presentation for the day;
- The facilitator achieved his aim of marking the register and of attracting students to relax and send some statements / questions that helped him to pick up any problematic areas before the class began;
- It was not easy for the facilitator to control a large class of eighteen students;
- All students seemed to be capable of writing in English using grammatically correct statements / questions (they all indicated that they are computer literate, so it was easy for them to chat);
- It was possible that students could ask other people to login using their names if they were not in the same classroom with their facilitator, and it would be difficult for the facilitator to pick it up.

The findings suggest that the online chat resource was dominated by the parasocial interaction (PSI) or liking construct because the students seemed to enjoy their interaction with the facilitator about social issues (Moyer-Guse, 2008). The online chat was observed to be powerful in dealing with social or entertainment issues but not powerful in motivating students with issues of education (module / course). With eighteen students the chat environment became busy and students failed to concentrate or focus on one issue and ended up attending to different issues of interest to them even when the issues had nothing to do with their module / course.

Who helps with document exchange? I, the Discussion Forum!

The facilitator came to the classroom and asked them to present their online PowerPoint presentations. Eight students whose presentations were uploaded presented and they all had pictures on their first slides with the students' names and other decorations that were reflecting what they wanted to be perceived as, by other student and the facilitator. For example P1 who had to present first had Dr Nelson R. Mandela's photograph (first black South African president) which had nothing to do with the theme for the lesson (the CAPS and Activity Theory). The discussion forum had other documents on the theme that were uploaded by the facilitator to support the students in their presentation preparations. F1 indicated that he always uploaded at least three documents per week to support his students before the lesson as his students were attending the module once a week (every Thursday). The PowerPoint presentations were uploaded by the students with attention seeking statements / questions that were similar to that of the chat. When the presenter was using the main screen all students had to open the same presentations on the computer screen and control the presentation appearance to suite their preference. Other students indicated that they were not comfortable with the main screen because it is controlled by the presenters. The classroom had forty computers which means there were more computers available than what the eighteen students required. Students indicated that they enjoyed and preferred the discussion forum presentation than the normal one main screen presentation because they control the presentation the way they liked. It was also noted that the discussion forum system took thirty minutes to send the uploaded documents or presentations and the facilitator indicated that the system was giving the users about thirty minutes to make sure that the uploaded presentation or document was the correct one. If it was not the correct one the users could still reverse it within the period of thirty minutes which was not good according to the facilitator as he preferred a maximum of five minutes. But he said '*we live with this thirty minutes period because we don't control the system like our system administrators… but we sometimes use email list to send if…*'.

The findings suggest that the online discussion forum is dominated by wishful identification and similarity because students' presentations had pictures that were representing what the students

would like to be perceived as by others (Moyer-Guse, 2008). Online discussion was seen as a powerful resource in terms of exchanging documents and PowerPoint presentations. However, it was taking a long time to upload the documents or presentation as a result students had to use emails because they were faster than their discussion forum especially for those who could not upload their presentations in advance.

Who helps with friends? I, the Facebook!

After sixty minutes (1 hour) of presentations the facilitator visited eight students' Facebook pages where five of the eight students gave the facilitator their Facebook identifications which were totally different from their real identifications, even the pictures that were representing them. They used animals, famous people and the like. They indicated that Facebook was searched and accessed by anyone therefore; they did not want to be known yet because they felt they were not famous. They wanted to be perceived the way they were presenting themselves on their Facebook pages. They indicated that they would always avoid meeting their friends who perceived them as famous people until they became famous. They used search engines to search for wise words and jokes when they were sending comments to their friends so as to maintain their identities as famous people. They indicated that, these identities had developed them because they had to search for powerful information every time when they had to comment on their Facebook pages. They indicated that they enjoyed that style of living as they were learning a lot from it. They even had more than one false email from Yahoo, Webmail, Google and Hotmail. Only three of the eight students were using their real identifications with their university emails.

These results suggest that Facebook is powerful in promoting identification and transportation constructs (Moyer-Guse, 2008) where students identify themselves as famous people and communicate with their friends using their new identification which helps them to learn while they are entertaining themselves using a false identification.

Who helps them with reflective journal? I, the Blog!

In the last fifteen minutes of the two hours the facilitator visited the eight students' blogs (the same students who presented and had their Facebook pages and blogs visited). The eight students seemed to be the most active students in the class while other did not have every activity that was required by their facilitator. Five of the eight students presented in the same way on their blogs as they did on their Facebook pages. They were even referring their friends to their Facebook pages for other information; from their Facebook pages they were referring them to their blogs. Their blogs had different entertainment activities that were linked to the internet site for YouTube where different activities including sports were viewed. These students were claiming that they are training the world champions in different sports codes or they were training with them or even staying with them in some instances. The five students indicated that they would continue like this because this is how they could learn and because they became powerful by searching for relevant information about famous people whom they follow when taking any decisions. They even indicated that if these famous people that they were representing could take wrong decisions in life, they would still follow them because they knew that they would correct those wrong things later. They also indicated that their friends were responding when they raised issues as if it was a joke, yet they knew that they needed real information concerning the particular issue or concern. The other thirteen students in the class seemed to be impressed with what was presented especially from the five students' blogs. They did however indicate that they also had the same types of blogs and Facebook pages where they were developing a lot of power through their powerful identification.

From this discussion, it would appear that the blogs also promote identification and transportation constructs (Moyer-Guse, 2008) since students become other powerful people in terms of identifications.

Discussion

These online resources promote what can be termed as Coincidental Learning which is in the space between Entertainment and Education. This will always happen if Technology of Education (TOE) is overpowered by Technology in Education (TIE). Coincidental Learning takes place in the absence of awareness where learning cannot be guaranteed to take place and it takes place by coincidence while students are entertaining themselves with other issues that are not related to their course or module. In highlighting this situation Amory (2010) indicates that learning is not about technology (TIE) but it is about the ideology (TOE) behind the use of these technologies. The participants were doing the opposite of this because they were enjoying the use of the online teaching and learning resources (TIE) in communicating, socializing or entertaining one another. As a result they were developing social knowledge and skills using the TIE. According to Watts and Lioyd (2000) this type of learning is good at helping students by increasing gains in TIE capabilities and presentation skills.

The findings indicate that, the intended aim of using these resources according to the facilitator (F1) was to teach and learn with these resources (apply both TIE & TOE) instead of learning from them (apply TIE only). The implemented aim appeared to be using these resources with the aim of learning from them (apply TIE only) instead of learning with them (apply both TIE & TOE). As a result the attained aim was then observed as being Coincidental Learning.

The following studies suggest that TIE is important in teaching and learning although it promotes Coincidental Learning: According to Tanner and Jones (2000) online resources motivate even normal passive students to contribute if there is a discussion. Pilkington (2004) observed passive students increasing their performance and participation. Holmes and Gardner (2006) concluded that online resources improve interaction and collaboration. Ivala and Gachago (2012) concluded that they are important because students get quicker answers; there is enhanced engagement and improved students' motivation. Therefore, these studies suggest that learning can take place without TOE because TIE is powerful enough to improve interaction, engagement and also to bring about learning. This means more entertainment than education.

On the other hand the following studies indirectly indicate the importance of TOE: According to Bowler (2009) online resources have to be used for signposting in order to open learning opportunities and save time for students and facilitators. In considering TOE Bowler (2009) indicates that it is important to invest in staff training and time taken when developing a course. Van Koller (2003) and Makoe (2012) see staff training as training that produces facilitators' competencies which are defined as personal resources that promote facilitators' actual performance in their jobs (experiences, knowledge and skills) (TOE). Kuh (2009) adds that what can be used to predict students' learning is the time and energy they spend on educational activities. This suggests that if students want to learn they should spend more time and energy on their course activities (TOE) but for the social development they should spend time and energy on the online resources (TIE). Therefore, these studies suggest the promotion of TOE (facilitator's competencies) in using TIE. Again, this means more education than entertainment.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the facilitator and students utilized or applied Coincidental Learning in teaching and learning the postgraduate Curriculum module which means that the teaching and learning process was about TIE (Entertainment from hardware and software) more than TOE (Education with Ideological-ware).

This study therefore recommends the utilisation or application of what can be termed Awareness Learning which takes place only when there is an appropriate balance between both TIE and TOE

in the teaching and learning environment. Awareness Learning is important in combining facilitators' competencies, online resources and all curriculum issues around the module or course (TIE & TOE). Learning using Awareness Learning means students are fully aware of the module or course curriculum (MICRO – teaching & module / course plan) and their own curriculum (NANO – student's personal plan for learning the module / course) (Van den Akker, Bannan, Kelly, Nieveen & Plomp, 2010) in their learning process.

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