



E-portfolios using mobile phones and social networking sites: Workplace skill acquisition and identity formation

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This paper reports on research undertaken based on socio-cultural perspectives and developed within an activity theory (Engestrom, 2001) framework. The ongoing projects involve the collection of evidence of workplace based evidence of skill and knowledge acquisition by bakery apprentices. Mobile phones are used to collect photographic, video, audio and text evidence. This multi-media evidence was initially archived on photo and video storing and sharing websites. The advance of social networking websites afforded opportunities to migrate evidence to social networking sites structured as eportfolios.

Keywords: e-portfolios, social networking, workplace learning, mobile learning vocational identity, knowledge formation.



Figure 1: Visual representation of CPIT mlearning eportfolio project

Findings

A review of the term 'digital natives'

The term 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001) has come into common usage to describe young peoples' familiarity with information and communications technology (ICT). It is based on a presumption that ICT skills of all young people born after 1985 are broader than 'digital immigrants' born before 1985.

However, this study has revealed a large subset of young people, born after 1985, who are differently ICT literate.

A need to re-frame competency based assessments to allow for more holistic representations of workplace based learning

Competency based assessments by virtue of their structure are often focused on the assessment of individual skills instead of holistic assessment structures based on recognising capability (Robertson, Harford, Strickland; Simons & Harris, 2000). The use of eportfolios, in this project, proposes a more holistic method for the aggregation of evidence of skills acquisition (Gibbs, 2002).

Making use of social networking sites to re-engage reluctant learners

For apprentices, extrinsic motivation through the need to complete qualifications does not always yield dividends. This is evidenced by low bakery apprentice completion rates (Mahoney, 2009). Workplace learning with its inherent challenges (Billett, 2001) and workplace assessment issues (Cornford, 1998; Robertson et al, 2000), contribute considerable barriers to workplace learning. A combination of social agency in the form of resilience and conscientious action on the part of individual apprentices; and support from a workplace cognisant of the learning needs of novices to the trade are pre-requisites to apprentices engaging with workplace learning (Chan, 2008).

Using social networking site based eportfolios to research workplace based skill attainment and identity formation

Social networking sites, by virtue of their structural framework, encourage the generation of user-generated multimedia entries. The sites also promote user-friendly networking capabilities. This further enhances opportunities for sites to be shared either with a close group of friends or with anyone able to access the Internet.

The construction of ubiquitous knowledge

Peng, Su, Chou and Tsai (2009) propose the concept of using mobile tools and the availability of 'cloud computing' to provide learners with the opportunity to not only access but create knowledge while 'un-tethered'. Therefore, this project provides one possible approach for trades apprentices to contribute their learning, ideas and innovations into their wider industry community of practice.

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