

Chapter 38

Identity and E-Learning

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation is changing the worlds of work and education. Although the hospitality industry has always operated at an international level, today's educators must prepare future managers for an increasingly diverse global world where we are all connected via technology in ways that were unimaginable even 10 years ago. Educators face strategic decisions about how and when they integrate technology into their programs. Transnational e-learning spaces, which are affecting the way we operate in our daily lives both at work and learning, have opened up. Educators need to fully understand what happens within these spaces—to the learners and to learning—in order to ensure that the quality of learning and the learning systems. This chapter considers ways in which hospitality management education can be enhanced through a focus on e-learning and identity.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers how identity is shaped via learning and advocates further investigation into how hospitality students navigate participation and learning in a transnational eLearning space. One of the benefits from studies such as these will be hospitality education programs that are more personalised and relevant to the individual learner. The hospitality industry has always operated at an international level. However today's educators must prepare future managers for an increasingly diverse, global world where we are all connected via technology in ways that were unimaginable even 10 years ago. Educators face strategic decisions about how and when they integrate technology into their programs. Previous decisions and their implementation have not always been successful. Sharma and Mishra (2007, p. 1) wrote that initial eLearning programs looked like “existing classroom models of teaching and learning”, with “very little thought on the pedagogical models relevant to the new medium”. Sigala (2002, p. 30) also found that models of eLearning under did not “fully exploit Internet capabilities for transforming and enhancing instruction”.

Hospitality management educators face the pressure to institute eLearning platforms without fully researching or comprehending how learning in an eLearning space works. Without careful consideration

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of not only the technology but of what happens to learners within these spaces, there is a risk of devaluing both the on-campus education as well as the eLearning programs. There is a risk of presenting programs that are not authentic and do not meet the needs of learners. Technology should not rule us as educators. Rather we should be making decisions about how and when technology should be part of the education process. Hospitality educators need to recognise that our learning space has changed, and that we need to understand the spaces of learning in order to move the industry forward in a productive, more efficient and relevant direction. There is a danger in the rush to be all things to all people that we lose sight of the individual learner in the learning equation. We need to assess whether initiatives such as eLearning are in fact the best tools to use to educate hospitality students. There is no doubt that technology has the potential to improve the quality of education offered to hospitality student. But educators need to approach the integration of technology in ways that do not “confuse technology with teaching” and ensure “critical discourse and dialogue” are a continuing part of the discussion concerning technology within education (Caplan, Myrick, Smitten, & Kelly, 2014, p. 1174). Educators need to ensure that they have not only the technological skills but the understanding of what happens to their online learners who use the technology which has been integrated into the learning process. Educators need to question the process.

BACKGROUND: THE LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2000, eLearning was described as a “new paradigm” that was profoundly changing the face of education, placing a focus on different learning models, a more collaborative learning environment and increased educational opportunities (Harasim, 2000). Cantoni, Kalbaska, and Inversini (2009, p. 148) citing the Commission of European Communities (2001, P.1) define eLearning as:

...the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration.

Haven and Botterill (2003, p. 76) further explain the concept by stating:

E-Learning involves the delivery and administration of learning opportunities and support via computer, networked and web-based technology, to help individual performance and development.

E-Learning has become an important vehicle for both educational institutions and organisations, being viewed as a way of giving choice and flexibility to learners, of opening up opportunities for both organisations and learners, and for reaching learners in different environments. However, advocating for a more critical study of educational technology, Selwyn (2010, p. 66) cites Laurillard (2008, P.1) by commenting that education has “been on the brink of being transformed by learning technology” for “some decades now”. The process of providing online learning is still a work in progress for many institutions. Within hospitality management education, there is a need to pause and critically assess how technology is utilised and integrated into programs in order to ensure that both the concepts and consequences are fully understood.

The eLearning environment and its various components has been researched comprehensively; research that encompasses issues from benefits and problems to pedagogy and design. In my opinion this

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