Chapter 4

Mobile Learning as 'Microlearning':
Conceptual Considerations towards Enhancements of Didactic Thinking

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents microlearning as a relational cross-over concept in the context of technological, societal, and cultural transformation. It maps the changing but ultimately convergent meanings of the term 'microlearning' as they have emerged and developed over the last few years. The author reveals microlearning to be not simply one approach among many, but instead as a perspective that applies to many aspects of education and learning including mobile learning. Furthermore, the question of a need for enhancement of didactic thinking is being presented. The answer is given in terms of four models such as the aggregation model, conglomerate model, emergence model, and the medium/form distinction, which are considered to be useful for the enhancement of didactic thinking.

INTRODUCTION

If we look at descriptions and analyses of society today, some of them are tied up with the postmodern condition in terms of post-industrial, computerized societies. Others are focussing on different aspects which are expressed in terms such as multi-cultural society, multi-option society, world society, education society, adventure society, fun society, communication society, information society, knowledge society, media society etc. Each of the descriptions opens up particular

horizons of discourse and analysis, and even if we are aware of their limits we cannot focus on the blind spots of the concepts while using them.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that many become uneasy about the possibility of clear indications for the future of education. Currently, we find paradoxes and ambivalences such as the need for educational change and processes of internationalization of education vs. wide-spread resistance to reform, the high value of economic performance vs. inequalities in life-chances, the ongoing commercialization of knowledge vs. knowledge obligation to the community, or problematic forms of edutainment vs. the need for media education and media literacy. For these paradoxes and ambivalences and many other current developments media are an important driver not only in terms of media technologies or media institutions but rather in the sense of a complex interplay between cultural, technological and societal dynamics (cf., Rusch, 2007).

Mediation means more than an aspect of technology which is opening up new spaces of communication, affecting habits, value systems and world views or changing the modes of perception and thinking. It means continuing transformation of the human condition in all of its physical, psychological, biological, socio-cultural and economic aspects.

Nevertheless, with the exception some individuals, school experiments, and innovative companies, the mainstream seems to insist on traditional models.

Our learning institutions have been created in the spirit of research and openness, yet they have acquired their own neurotic tendencies. Most notable is the strong reaction to change in the classic models of distributing learning. Models of courses, programs, and degrees are still central, even though technology and new needs on the part of learners are creating a climate that requires a more dynamic alternative. (Siemens, 2005, p. 4)

But how can we promote learning and educational processes in mediated working spaces and life-worlds? In this paper it is argued that microlearning is a useful relational cross-over concept. Concepts of microlearning offer flexible and dynamic alternatives which are needed in view of medial, societal and environmental changes.

The author reveals microlearning to be not simply as one approach among many, but instead as a perspective that applies to many aspects of education and learning including mobile learning. Furthermore, the question of a need for enhancement of didactic thinking is being posed. The answer is given in terms of four models (aggregation model, conglomerate model, emergence model, medium/form distinction) which are considered to be useful for the enhancement of didactic thinking.

MICROLEARNING: CLARIFICATIONS AND DEFINITION

In the rapidly-changing world of the Internet and the Web, theory and research frequently struggle to catch up with developments, interactions and permutations in technology and the social forms and practices evolving with it. In respect of practical issues, lots of promises have been made when introducing distributed education, networked learning and distance learning. Are we moving on from e-learning promises to mobile learning promises? Are there useful cross-over concepts in a situation of moving cultures and fragmentation of knowledge, formats, audiences, and even life?

As it has developed, microlearning can be said to have potential and practical usefulness as a relational cross-over concept. In contrast to microteaching and also to other terms such as microphysics or microbiology, microlearning is a rather new notion. Similar to related notions such as microcontent or micromedia, it has been in use only since about 2002, though many aspects of learning, didactics and education have been

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