PUTTING RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS INTO PRACTICE: AN ONLINE PERSPECTIVE

Sai Loo
Institute of Education, University of London, London, UK

Background to the topic:

The emphasis on learning using technologies is not new. In the UK, the Open University since its formation in the late 1960’s has been a keen advocate of distance learning approach. Again in 2012, the university with other UK higher education institutions (HEIs) established a company – Futurelearn – to provide massive open online courses. Despite decades of offering distance-learning provisions with the support of technologies, there are still debates about this relatively new form of learning and teaching. This paper uses this opportunity to focus on a specific online programme by an English HEI institution.

Research questions/focus of the enquiry:

The focus of this research is to investigate how research knowledge and skills acquired on the programme, are applied in the participants’ work practices. Knowledge and skills are widely defined to include disciplinary, explicit and tacit ones from past and present experiences. The targeted participants are nearing the completion of their programme of study. As the programme is online, the potential participants cover a wide geographical spectrum over five continents. They also vary in terms of work settings, age groups and ethnicity.

The research questions include:

1. What knowledge and skills are acquired from the programme?
2. How are they applied in the work settings?
3. Is the learning process from this online programme any different to face-to-face programmes?

Research methods and/or mapping of the literature:

This paper reports on the findings of qualitative (one-to-one semi-structured interviews via skype) and quantitative (questionnaire) study of seven participants who have or in the process of completing the doctoral online programme in educational and social research.

Analytical and/or theoretical frame:

This paper uses a social constructivist approach (Vygotsky 1978; Knorr-Cetina 2005; Huang 2002) to ground this study on learning by the adult participants together with a new conceptual framework to understand how knowledge may be acquired and applied in different work settings through the forms of recontextualization (Evans et al. 2010; Loo 2012).
Research findings and/or contribution to knowledge:

The paper identifies strategies, which facilitate online acquisition and applications of knowledge, skills and abilities together with some issues and challenges. It provides also a better understanding of the relevance of the online doctoral programme to the participants’ various work settings.