ABSTRACT

Mobile technologies such as tablets, iPads, laptops, netbooks as well as mobile phones with internet connectivity and recording features present new challenges to the academy. In the age of convergence and with the encoding of several features into mobile telephony, private spaces of the classroom can be reconfigured through the mediation of technologies. In most cases, existing rules and regulations of higher education institutions do not comprehensively address these challenges. The introduction of new technologies into the classroom has been often framed historically as vital and relevant for a progressive academic society or as part of a national imperative to transform the ways in which the authors access and engage with knowledge. This paper surveys British universities to examine how they govern the phenomenon of recording content through mobile technologies. The results reveal a pervasive use of mobile devices in UK universities and clear divergences in approaches to enacting mobile device-specific policies to govern the usage of these technologies.

Keywords: British, Classroom, Higher Education, Mobile Device, Mobile Technologies, United Kingdom

INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of new media and mobile technologies into education and classroom settings invariably reconfigures the arrangement of the classroom as a bounded space. The convergence of different technological features in mobile communication devices enable the classroom to be recorded and accessed in multiple formats projecting it beyond its physical presence. This technological mediation of the classroom then opens it to new forms of scrutiny, dissemination and commodification (i.e. turning lecture material into podcasts and videocasts), as well as governance in the age of convergence.

Higher education institutions have historically incorporated technologies into academic settings to enhance teaching and delivery. With new media technologies and ICTs, the incorporation of these into the economy has had a higher imperative at a national level in many
countries. The discourse of the digital economy and equally the knowledge economy has focused on the transformations of social, political and economic life through the appropriation and adoption of ICTs to emphasise the importance of knowledge exchange and transactions through the emergence of networked societies and markets. The education sector is no exception where the rate of appropriation of ICTs and the imperative to enhance pedagogy and access have not completely reconciled the new challenges which have been unleashed by these. The need to widen access or participation have often implicated new media technologies in the classroom where these are seen as offering new ways to disseminate information in virtual platforms thus reconfiguring the classroom as a permeable space amenable to virtual iterations.

As personal mobile devices are lightweight and portable, they become embedded as part of the corporeal body. At a meta level the appropriation of the mobile phone in our everyday lives forges a reality which incorporates the rituals and pace of its use. The integration of a multitude of functions such as image capture, audio recording, internet connectivity, text messaging and publishing features into mobile telephony as well as the embedding of these technologies (particularly the mobile phone) on our bodies can have consequences for the ways we learn, remember, access the wider world and order our lives (see Ibrahim, 2010b). In higher education students’ pervasive use of mobile phones and devices means that the classroom is mediated through individual technologies of the students as well as the technologies of the classroom. The coalescing of individual machines with those of the classroom provide for new ways of networking and connecting to knowledge. In most institutions, e-learning platforms are designed to be connected to mobile devices so that materials can spill from institutional e-platforms to mobile devices including the mobile phone. The infrastructure of newer e-learning platforms is designed to disseminate information and communication instantaneously and on demand and often anticipates its access through mobile devices within or without the classroom.

It is unsurprising, given this multi-functionality and the widespread use of mobile devices among 18–24 year olds (see, OfCom, 2012) that universities should seek to capitalise on this connectivity to augment access and engagement and to reach new markets through virtual platforms. For example, 94 percent of students at one British institution are regular users of mobile phones (Davidson & Lutman, 2007; see also Wishart & Green, 2010; Ongondo & Williams, 2011) and 95 percent of students in a university in northeastern USA bring theirs to class every day (Tindell & Bohlander, 2012). Higher education institutions have perceived this as signalling a new, individualized approach to learning (Traxler, 2007, p14, in Belshaw 2011). The ubiquitous use of mobile devices in our everyday lives, and the personalisation of content and applications demonstrate rising and varied media and technical literacies among the younger generation (see Jones et al., 2010; Chen & Katz, 2009). The potential benefits of mobile technologies then go beyond the cost effective provision of lecture recordings; they include the empowerment of the learner through student-controlled capture and mobile flexible access and use (see Belshaw, 2011 p. 8).

The empowering potential of technology may at a glance paint a rosy picture of the academy in futuristic ways. In reality, the flipside of this romantic trope are the issues and challenges raised by the incorporation of new technologies in the classroom. One particular area of scrutiny is the emergence of information-privacy risks which arise when mobile devices are used to capture, upload and disseminate material indiscriminately in the wider domain. This article assesses how UK universities address the capture of content in the classroom through mobile devices and the distinct approaches in responding to this phenomenon in the realm of higher education particularly in assuaging other competing rights such as those in the disability provisions.
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