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Call for papers for a Special Issue of The *British Journal of Educational Technology*

Emerging Technologies and Authentic Learning in Higher Vocational Education Contexts

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Overview:

This special 2016 journal issue, *BJET Volume 47, Issue 4,* will offer an edited collection of peer-reviewed evidence-based, theoretical and/or philosophical research papers on *Emerging Technologies and Authentic Learning in Higher Vocational Education Contexts*. The edition draws together complex debates that connect the cognitive, social and cultural dimensions of authentic learning in real-world contexts with pedagogic explorations in the development of emerging technologies within higher vocational education. This convergence of themes recognizes both the unstoppable global momentum of technological change and the need for a contextualized pedagogic focus in developing authentic learning environments to prepare higher education students to cope with ill-defined, ambiguous problems in the highly competitive and unequal struggle to achieve in the workplace. We therefore invite papers for a *BJET* Special Issue situated at the interface between these fields. Selected papers from the *Emerging Technologies and Authentic Learning in Higher Vocational Education Contexts* 2015 conference at UCT will be included in the edition.

About the Call

A significant literature on authentic learning highlights the value of enabling students to learn in real-world contexts using pedagogic practices such as cognitive apprenticeships (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989), problem-solving and case-based reasoning in constructivist learning environments (Jonassen, 1999), situated learning in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 2008; Wenger, 2002; Jameson et al., 2006) role-playing, simulation and experimentation. Authentic learning applied in IT-enabled learning environments using emerging technologies (ETs) extends this potential further (Herrington and Oliver, 2000; Lombardi, 2007; Bozalek, 2013; Ng'ambi and Bozalek, 2013), as technological innovations continue to open up the reach and verisimilitude of contextualised and work-based learning techniques to encompass 24/7 virtual asynchronous use of software and communications. Recognition of the situated nature of knowledge within the context, culture, social practices and activities in which it is embedded arguably enables deeper, more authentic engagement in learning.

However, scholarly debates in this field are diverse, understandings of authentic learning are variable, and pedagogic uses of emerging technologies are by no means automatically effective in achieving student engagement. Further, even when learning is meaningful, when teaching techniques are effective and when students achieve qualifications, there is no guarantee that they will gain employment, especially at an appropriate level of knowledge and skills. With international unemployment levels set to rise, disproportionately affecting young people, an estimated 74.5 million people aged 15-24 across the world are unemployed, as the International Labour Organization reported recently, highlighting the dangers of a global financial 'recovery without jobs' (ILO, 2014).

At the same time, a global race, particularly by young people, to gain technological skills and social media connectivity is taking place, underpinning international increases in the use of ICT across developing countries, as broadband costs have declined and mobile phone communications expanded, notably in Asia and Africa (ITU, 2013). Innovative online educational technologies have rapidly expanded in influence and power, bringing new opportunities, disruptive transformations and unplanned cultural changes to educational organizations and to students now directly equipped with their own wifi access, smartphones, tablets, ebooks and social media apps, enabling impromptu, experimental forms of learning and communication. A vast expansion in mobile ICT take-up has now enabled even those in the poorest, most inaccessible rural communities to gain access to learning and employment opportunities hitherto impossible (Czerniewicz et al., 2009).

For people with the skills, self-agency and connecting devices to learn how to use ICT independently, it is now, in theory, feasible for 100% online learning to be achieved remotely from any location, using free online courses such as MOOCs organized by elite institutions across the world. It is also possible independently to develop new income streams from self-publishing or innovatory start up businesses. These opportunities are most productively realized when supported by good ICT resources and effective local advice with the backing of family members, but are even possible without this. As Mitra has shown, 'minimally invasive education' using digital technologies (Mitra and Rana,

2001) can facilitate self-teaching amongst enthusiastic young people who can gain important skills even in poorer socio-economic circumstances, although enterprising self-teaching is not often a sound route to secure employment.

These trends, in combination with multiple anxieties about personal identity, social status, unemployment and poverty, have intensified global competition and youth ambition for visible achievement and tangible benefits in an increasingly economically focused, utilitarian, data-driven and marketized international education environment, in which high levels of youth unemployment are accelerating. As Czerniewicz et al. (2009) note regarding students from lower socio-economic groups who, in spite of many challenges, 'make a plan' to achieve personal agency in South Africa: "computers are the means to a 'better' life, to success in the market place and possibly to future financial security".

Yet assumptions underlying educational ambition that jobs will follow qualifications or that dreams of social mobility will always be achieved need careful reconsideration in the current climate. Rising levels of income inequality, increasing migration and fiercely performative world-wide competition for academic credentials and employment have been combined, in some contexts, with the 'broken promises' of government policies and cultural expectations that learning will be intrinsically tied always to earnings (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011).

This set of complex circumstances has led to a focus in this call on enabling students to experience effective authentic learning in higher *vocational* education that is not merely instrumentalist, not merely a product of digital Taylorism, nor driven by technologically determinism, but that enables students to achieve meaningful understanding, confidence, personal validation, adaptability, critical thinking and resilience in the meaningful acquisition of competitive knowledge and skills to equip them in the longer term for uncertain and changeable flexible working environments.

As these developments are evolving rapidly, there is a gap in recent literature in educational technology that traces the combination of issues affecting authentic learning practices which apply newer pedagogic innovations enabled by emerging technologies in higher vocational education. While a growing number of academic publications are addressing such innovatory practices as transformative pedagogic uses of MOOCS, cloud computing, digital gaming, virtual worlds, podcasts, ITunesU, IPads, blogs, wikis, e-portfolios, and multiple uses of social media for teaching and learning, there is little that applies authentic learning developments to emerging technologies in higher education in the context of vocational aspects of lifelong learning. We open up the definition of 'vocational higher education' to include academic, professional, vocational and occupational learning at all levels in any subject area, without presupposition of limitations, and invite thoughtful, innovative interpretations of these terms. The focus is on learning in a real world context: on emerging technologies in authentic learning situations that are relevant to higher vocational education.

We therefore invite empirical, theoretical and philosophical academic articles that address the special issue theme of *Emerging Technologies and Authentic Learning in Higher Vocational Education Contexts.*

To access the call on-line, go to: www.blackwellpublishing.com/journals/bjet

Important Dates:

Early submissions opening date: 1st May 2015
Deadline for submissions: 30th June 2015
Notification of review process: 31st July 2015
Final copy from Authors to Guest Editors: 1st December 2015
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