Musings of an online learner

I **do lik**e being a learner.   I especially like it when I have to do battle with new ideas and end up with a totally different way of thinking. This can happen over time or be catalysed by training/experiences. For example, going on a Prince2 (project management) course brought about a bit of an epiphany, I was genuinely excited about having a new set of tools and a way of thinking to keep a major project on track.   Interestingly this was technology-devoid learning – chalk and talk with discussion and exercises comprising a 3 day mental boot-camp.

IT and Lollipops

Working loosely in the field of IT means that learning happens all the time. If learning wasn't appealing I'd probably go off and be a lolly pop lady.

I am acutely aware that 99.9% of the things I know, I have picked up from people. That may be real time face to face interactions with colleagues, clients, people on training courses, people in the pub or technology mediated via email, papers, websites, tweets, Ning, etc…but ultimately people are at the end of it. Technology *enhances learning potential* by doing away with the requirement to occupy the same space and time (almost like Dr Who). I like good technology, but I also like to talk and muse.

Technology the good and bad

Technology has had most impact on how I learn in the workplace. Circa 1990 my network was restricted to those people I could confidently telephone or email.   Now, I can learn from people I will never meet. Those kindly folk who have placed code samples on websites, let me look in on their software battles and give me ideas on where to go next.

As a returning "student" I have struggled with how to study in a way that means that I actually engage with and remember the material I read. Again, people have been really helpful, those probing questions on forums and interesting insights. What I've taken to doing is to highlight pdfs on screen and put crazy notes in the margins, then if it's worth it write something blog-like or put some notes in OneNote.
These *technology mediated study skills* are only really relevant outside workplace learning. In the workplace you get a problem, do battle with it (normally involving going round 5 sides of a hexagon), and then work out the easy way. The easy way is then forever etched on your brain alongside the memories of the frustration of getting there.   (ah yes learning involves challenge).

I have many experiences of bad technology: waiting 10 seconds for a keypress to echo on a terminal at Birmingham University, coding a hash table from scratch (why?), most things to do with Windows 3.0/Windows ME/ DragonDicate 1.3/Internet

access over a dial up line and crazy expenses systems. Many of these have provoked ideas of throwing PCs in the canal. Recent online learning frustrations pale into insignificance in comparison but the following are worthy of mention: Compendium LD, early experiences of Elluminate, editing Moodle from IE8, clicking to empty blogs and secure PDFs.

Technology Fatigue

Drawing an analogy from Chemistry, some reactions (that release energy) require a bit of activation energy to get them going. Bad technology can require so much energy itself that the reward of the learning is either never realised or somehow feels disappointingly disproportionate.   In these instances I would phone a friend for solace or probe them for some hidden keys (think catalyst), or just give up.

PLEs PLNS and metaphor fatigue

When representing my Personal Learning Environment I deliberately foregrounded tools and applications. But, what is clear is that these technologies mediate connections with real people – lots of fine people who form my learning network.

…. now the next bit is: "Drawing on what you have read, try to represent your Personal Learning Environment in three different ways.". But, sadly, I've lost interest.   That's too many metaphors in one day for me

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