Language, Culture and Technology in a Connected World Symposium

1 June 2015 - University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland

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Hosted by the University of Southern Queensland and sponsored by the USQ Multicultural Network, this one-day symposium was a unique event which aimed to provide a forum to discuss connections between culture, language and technology. This symposium brought together researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to share insights into the challenges and opportunities that a networked society presents. This gathering explored practical policies and approaches to identify better ways of linking different cultures in such a way that communication, harmony, acceptance and respect between different cultures is achieved and maintained.

In addition to its practical contributions, the event aimed to help both professionals and academics to engage in networking and formal publication.

The symposium program included keynote and panel, paper, and poster sessions. The symposium was organized around four suggested, but not exhaustive, themes:

• **Technological Influences on Culture and Language**
• **Cultural Diversity and its Impact on Local Communities**
• **Bridging the Culture Gaps between Australia and China**
• **The Role of Emerging Technologies in Building Communities**

Symposium Organising Committee:

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1

Technological Readiness for the Digital Future: Perspectives on Regional Australia

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Abstract

The Internet represents the most important technological development of our generation. It has eventually become a worldwide phenomenon – transforming avenues of entertainment, modes of communication, the art of information–gathering, and the delivery of health and education services across the globe. Individuals, businesses and institutions need to embrace the fast-changing information age and capitalise on the emerging digital technologies that are underpinning so many of these changes.

The digital futures project at the University of Southern Queensland examines the implications of the adoption and use of digital technologies, and links the usages to a broad range of values, behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions of the communities in rural and regional Australia. How residents adapt to these developments, particularly the high-speed broadband Internet, is a primary focus of this research.

This paper, using data from recently conducted surveys with over 400 households in the Western Downs region of Queensland, highlights communities' readiness to meet the challenges of the digital futures and discusses opportunities that the emerging technologies create in rural and regional Australia. It also provides an insight on the inequalities between the technological 'haves' and 'have-nots' and the intervention strategies for underdeveloped communities and underserved social groups to address this digital divide.

Key words: Australia, digital divide, digital future, technological readiness, Western Downs region.

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Technology in Learning Languages

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Abstract

Over the past few years, we have been witnessing the emergence of very interesting and clever products for the smart phones and tablets. These products provide a wonderful opportunity and flexibility for learning any language, practically at any time and place.

This paper addresses the role of the latest technologies in language learning. The adopted research method involved the use of dedicated and the latest features available on the smart phones and tablets, and their software programs (apps). The application of the emerging and advanced features such as speech recognition capabilities were investigated. A number of different languages including Japanese and Mandarin were used in the experiment.

The findings indicate that the concept of learning by guidance can be a very effective approach in general learning. The idea can also be applied to language learning. It was also concluded that the language should be, ideally, learnt in a natural manner. This approach is very similar to how one learns to speak as a child. Therefore one should commence by listening first and then imitating and speaking.

According to the research outcome on which this paper is based, the latest technologies such as speech recognition can be utilised to produce effective educational materials for immersive language education. Hence, the technology enables a learner to simulate the learning by guidance situation in the absence of the tutor or an opportunity of being in the actual environment.

Key words: Language Learning, Learning by Guidance, Technology

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Affording (Dis)Connections: Technological Influences on Generating Productive and Transformative Research Languages and Cultures in Australian and Japanese Universities

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Abstract

The development and sustainability of rich and thriving research cultures are simultaneously the holy grail and the mission impossible of contemporary universities in Australia and internationally. Finding a common research language that traverses and transcends disciplinary differences and paradigmatic priorities is a similarly crucial yet challenging task. Harnessing the competitiveness that often characterise research teams in ways that foster collaboration while still encouraging focus and innovation is another aspiration of many current research leaders.

Technologies of all kinds can play a significant role in facilitating and/or impeding the attainment of these worthy goals. Affordance theory (Gibson, 1979) provides a useful conceptual lens for identifying the influence of specific technologies on the work and identities of contemporary researchers and for assessing their respective contributions to generating effective research languages and cultures.

This paper presents a comparative, exploratory case study of this intersection between technologies and research languages and cultures, gleaned from the authors' shared and separate experiences as researchers and research leaders in three different universities in Australia and Japan. The authors' theoretically informed reflections on those experiences are analysed to distil some broader lessons for applying affordance theory to the aspirations and outcomes of researchers from a range of disciplines and paradigms in the three universities. These broader lessons in turn suggest some important implications for understanding research nationally and internationally as constituting a world that is in many ways connected and in other significant ways stubbornly disconnected, and for realising what this means for research development and support in universities today.

Reference

Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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Tragedy or opportunity: Could Lessons Learned During the Ebola Epidemic in Liberia Provide the Impetus for More Effective Health Communication Solutions?

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Abstract

Disease epidemics are becoming more common in our global society necessitating effective health education/promotion to halt their spread. Health promotion is crucial to containing disease epidemics because its focus is on changing the attitudes and behaviours that encourage the spread of the disease within an at-risk population. In theory, health promotion strategies must be culturally embedded in order to be understood and adopted by the at-risk population. But how possible is this goal in reality? A case study of the second wave of the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Liberia is presented as an example of how a lack of culturally embedded health promotion messages culminated in a lack of compliance to infection control measures by Liberians. Daily news articles and periodic reports by health agencies and International NGOs were read in order to piece together the case. The results of this case study highlight the challenges of translating health promotion theory into practice and conclude by discussing opportunities for improving cultural embedding of messages through technology.

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Towards power equity, cultural complementary and relational conflict resolution: Implications on Regional Development

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Abstract

The reality that resource-led development has not lived up to its rhetorical promise in many regional resource towns and communities globally has rendered corporate-community platforms more conflictual, than as a means of shared benefits. As a result, the urgent need for more responsive approaches that can transform such business-society adversarial relations has emerged, not quickly but inevitably. However, emerged approaches still suffer the challenges of power inequality, superiority of corporate culture over local culture as well as unfavorable partnership conditions, and hence corporate-community partnership as a mechanism towards regional development has seen little success. This study approached resource-led regional development from three key perspective; power, culture and relational quality, using case evidences from four Australian regional towns namely Roma, Chinchilla, Wambo and Miles-Wandoan.

Regards to power, the study adopts an empowerment case – a condition capable of restoring some level of power among marginalized regional towns. Findings indicate that as local communities are empowered through reliable information flow and capacity building initiatives, they tend to become more salient stakeholders to managers of firms. Hence, firms begin to recognize the influence of local communities in decisions that affect community good and regional development. The study further adopts a cultural complementary approach – which aims to ensure a balance in superiority of firm choices (corporate culture) and societal supremacy (local culture). The imbalances between these two extremes of business/society interests have undermined the quality of corporate-led regional development efforts, where outcomes fail to address true needs of regional towns and communities. Study findings unveiled that adopted cultural complementary approach positively fosters regional development. Adding to these, the study results show that healthy partnership attributes - trust, openness, social learning, credibility and shared value, are prerequisite catalysts for effective conflict resolution. The study findings affirm that each attributes makes unique

contribution towards conflict resolution process, which helps to create enabling environment where regional development is fostered.

The study aims to promote understanding of the need for regional development policies to be sensitive to power, cultural and partnership quality issues, as failures can exacerbate the current direction that regional development has taken in recent times. The study acknowledges that application of study results in other social impacts regions and industries through future studies is urgent.

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Hazards, migration and coping strategy: A Case Study from Rural Bangladesh

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Abstract

Rural riverine households of Bangladesh are confronted with many climatic hazards including riverbank erosion leading to loss of land and other natural resources and thus threaten their livelihoods and food security. The purpose of this paper is to examine the impacts of climatic hazards on livelihoods and food security and the means by which these households response to such disasters. Cross-sectional data of 380 riverbank erosion affected rural households from Sirajgong district of Bangladesh were collected along with six focus group discussions. Study reveals that livelihoods were impacted in a range of areas such as damage of homestead, food security, access to education and health services, infrastructure and changing in farming status. About 43 percent and 24 percent of households had lost their homestead more than three times and at least once, respectively, during the last 10 years. Migration was found to be one of the most opted coping strategies which was triggered by a lack of employment opportunities and farm land, and insufficient income. Households that have no or limited agricultural practices coupled with inadequate employment opportunities are more prone to migrate. Households are responding to the hazards through adoption of new crop varieties, changing plantation time, and diversifying livelihood strategies. This information could contribute to a better understanding of the available resources to effectively support the coping and adaptation strategies to improve the livelihoods and food security of the riverine households.

Key words: Hazards, food security, migration, riverbank erosion, coping and adaptation strategy, rural households

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Un/characterising the Local: Later Life and Learning in Rural Queensland

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Abstract

Located in Queensland's Granite Belt in the Great Dividing Range, and close to the borderlands of the Granite Highlands in Northern New South Wales, the rural township of Stanthorpe has many distinguishing features. It is the heart of the region's wine and hospitality industries, enjoys close proximity to popular national parks and hosts a number of cultural festival and industry events each year. Stanthorpe is also thought typical of smaller, rural communities west of the 'great divide' which are characterised by an 'ageing population.' Indeed, the claim is that by 2036 a third of the overall population of Stanthorpe will be over the age of 65. Reporting a low median income, comparatively lower post-compulsory education qualifications, and lower uses of information communication technologies (ICTs) than Brisbane metropolitan or Queensland's larger coastal towns, Stanthorpe can be said to confirm common discourses of marginalisation and rural disadvantage. Yet, the uncharacteristic can happen. Stanthorpe is also home to the Granite Belt's digital community hub GraniteNet which supports the town's growth as a learning community. This paper, then, discusses the emergence of 'minor' or inconsequential learning as generative of viable regional engagement practice through a collaborative digital learning project between GraniteNet, the University of Southern Queensland and selected aged care volunteers in the Granite Belt. With the recent release of the *2015 Intergenerational Report – Australia in 2055*, the paper intersects with the persuasions of demographic data to present new understandings for learning and connectedness in later life, signaling both implications for the aged care sector and the revision of lingering deficit narratives regarding rural Australia.

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"I would like to learn all things that will help me in the future": ICT, Academic Success and Refugees at USQ

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Abstract

Beginning in the late 1990's, Toowoomba has become a major resettlement area for refugees from Northern and Central Africa. As a result, many students commenced in the pathway programs at USQ, presenting with a range of issues unique to this particular cohort. One of these issues was digital literacy, a core foundation set of skills required to progress into a learning environment that increasingly relies on information technology skills.

In response to this perceived issue and a lack of access to the technology itself, in 2012 a small group of instructors, funded by Social Justice Grants, began to provide ICT training and laptops to students from refugee backgrounds. For a very low cost to the University, students were able to learn key digital literacy skills and improve on their Academic English skills in a friendly and supportive environment, preparing them for their degree programs. Over three years the course offered was transformed due to the increasing demand of students for more applied knowledge and the changing cohort of students who attended.

This paper will describe the situation that presented itself for students from refugee backgrounds in the initial years of the project. It will then discuss the objectives and outcomes of the ICT program and outline the necessity of ICT competency as a contributor to success for students from refugee students in the digital age. Finally, in light of changing student cohorts and a concurrent freezing of funding from the federal government, the paper will explore the current difficulties of having the project funded on a continuing basis and ask the audience to consider possible solutions.

Key words: refugees, CALD, digital literacies

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Crossing the cultural divide: Overcoming inequities for NESB prisoners using digital technologies

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Abstract

One of the fastest growing groups in Australian prisons are people from Non English Speaking backgrounds (NESB). They are generally overrepresented in the criminal justice system in part due to increased migration and globalisation, but mostly because of their difficulties in seeking adequate legal representation and access to justice. They pose a significant challenge for correctional jurisdictions as these prisoners, due to difficulties with language, have limited social opportunities, and greatly diminished access to legal, medical and educational resources. While most jurisdictions ensure that prison inductions are conducted in the prisoner's first language, this is often the last time the attempt is made.

While in prison, NESB prisoners are subject to racism and persecution from fellow inmates. This is a particular issue for some Aboriginal prisoners where in some jurisdictions, English may be their second, third or even fourth language. There are significant differences in how prisoners from different cultural backgrounds interact and socialise, practice their religion, and celebrate their cultures. These differences present both a variety of challenges, but also some opportunities.

Technology has the potential to alleviate some of the issues associated with incarceration for NESB prisoners. Even so, access to technology and resources is made even more difficult as most Australian jurisdictions don't allow access to the internet. This paper concludes with an overview of some recommendations for the use of technology within correctional centres to alleviate some of the challenges faced by male and female prisoners from NESB.

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Social Capital: in Religion, Communities, and Education.

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Abstract

Think of Social Capital as links, shared values, and understandings in a society which encourages groups and individuals to trust each other, and so work together in harmony. The mere thought of Social Capital is very appealing because it resonates with noble sentiments of camaraderie and connectedness. For example, the declining faith communities where people worship together are perhaps the single most important repository of Social Capital in Australia. Also, a brief historical account of immigration, the multi-faith evolution, and the spiritual nature of indigenous Australia provides insight into incubator models of Social Capital. A variable of the diminishing local community scene is the Internet and its rapid growth of social networking, where individuals create virtual online communities consisting of both bonding and bridging with Social Capital. Furthermore, the associational nature of sporting clubs provide supportive forums for the creation of Social Capital. Compatible democratic societies are fragile works-in-progress, and their existence depends upon thoughtful citizens who believe in diversified ideals. Therefore, educational institutions, multiculturalism, and the third-sector, are recognised for their civil society product, which delivers a wellspring of Social Capital. The subjective matter emphasises and enhances cooperation, rather than competition. Social Capital is naturally oriented toward consensus rather than conflict, to commonality as opposed to difference and remains woven into the fabric of Religion, Communities, and Education.

Key words: Social Capital, Society, Connected, Links, Education, Religion, Community, Internet, Virtual, Networks, Faith

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Speaking with one language for Humanitarian assistance: uniting the different voices during disaster relief operations.

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Abstract

Cyclone Pam, a category five storm struck with devastating effect on Vanuatu on Friday 13 March 2015. The international Humanitarian Community, (HC), was quick to respond, as were the military forces of France. New Zealand, Australia and other Pacific nations, to the Government of Vanuatu's (GOVU) call for Humanitarian Assistance, (HA), with Disaster Relief, (DR).

Uniting the efforts of International Organisations, (IOs), Non-Government Organisations, (NGOs), and various militaries with agencies of the GOVU under the auspices of a United Nations, (UN), led operation required that specific attention was required to bridging and uniting the cultural and sub-cultural differences embodied in this mix of organisations into a coherent and effective 'language' for the benefit of the people of Vanuatu.

This paper presents on side of a story which unfolded in response to a significant natural disaster in the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu; constructing order from chaos in more ways than one.

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Technology and the Future of Iran`s English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Considering the abundant use of technology in the language learning process and autonomy development of language learners, as a futures study, this study aimed to analyze the chance of the replacement of EFL teachers with technology in the context of Iran. Considering Casual Layered Analysis (CLA) as the method of data analysis, qualitative data were collected from 10 recordings of interviews with EFL university professors. After inspecting the four layers of CLA, the results revealed that Iran's culture would not allow this replacement to happen at least in another fifteen years. Iran, as a hierarchal, collectivist, and restrained society by a normative cultural orientation and preference for avoiding uncertainty cannot accept the technology innovation so immediately to replace teachers. Further research would be needed to perform this study in a wider scope of time and to explore the probable consequences**.**

Keywords: Casual Layered Analysis (CLA), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Technology

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Mission possible: helping Chinese students studying with Australian universities to improve their English

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Abstract

China has emerged as the top one sourcing country for Australian tertiary education sector as a result of its rapid economic development and huge population base since early of the 21st century. However, Australian universities' love affair with China is not problem free. Of those problems Australian universities have experienced with teaching Chinese students, inappropriate English language capabilities has been identified as a major one in the literature. This creates a love and hate situation for many Australian universities. On the one hand, many Australian universities really need incomes from those Chinese students to supplement their short budget to ensure smooth operation. On the other hand, inadequate English language capabilities of many Chinese students have caused such problems as increasing academic misconduct and decreasing academic performance in the Australian tertiary education system, especially in many language demanding disciplines such as business and management.

Many Australian universities want to resolve this problem by raising the entry English language requirement, the reality is that not many Chinese students can then jump over such a higher English language requirement bar from above. Indeed, an expectation conflicting situation can be observed in this regard. That is, while one of the most important goals for many Chinese students to choose studying with an Australian university is that by doing so they hope it will help them improve their English, what they actually find out once they are enrolled into the system is that in reality often they will be told that it is not their Australian course lecturers' responsibility to teach them English language because they should already possess such a capability to be enrolled into the course. The existence of such an expectation conflicting situation often result in disappointment of both Australian academics and Chinese students.

So is there a solution to this problem? The author of this paper proposes that a solution does exist but will need to be incorporated into our national and university internationalisation strategies. Fundamentally, we need to realise that China is an important market most Australian universities need to rely on for their development into the 21 century. Once we can come to an agreement on this issue, then we need to have a

national strategy to better develop into the growing Chinese international education market and prepare potential Chinese students' English capabilities through partnership arrangements at the university preparation pathway programs or even secondary education stage. At the university level, better language teaching services should be provided to help those potential Chinese students to improve their English capabilities by utilising both online and offline instruction methods. Then language assistance needs to be continuously offered once these Chinese students arrive in Australia to help them overcome the initial language and cultural barriers they may encounter during their first year study with an Australian university.