

Designs on eLearning: The Art of Disruptive Engagement

Dr Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas, London College of Fashion

'I learned about myself': Using blogs to foster self-reflection and collaborative learning

The transmission model of education is no longer relevant for the 21st century university; educators do not have the monopoly on knowledge. The digital natives who populate our classrooms are bombarded with information at an unprecedented rate, from sources worldwide, available anytime, anywhere in the hyper-connected virtual world, and there is an imperative to rethink the purpose of a contemporary creative education. The digital revolution and social media have made it possible to forge links across space and time, offering new ways to connect with likeminded people. This situation, exploited by media and retailers worldwide, has thus far made minimum impact within higher education institutions, and it is timely to discuss how new technologies can be imbedded across the curriculum and used to enhance the student experience. The walls of the twenty-first century classroom can be expanded by the utilisation of social media that offer exciting opportunities for educators to engage students via the use of online communication tools such as blogs. There is evidence that student satisfaction is increased when learners feel part of a community, and blogs can harness students' enthusiasm for digital communications and increase engagement in and out of class.

New technologies offer the possibility to remodel twenty-first century education and teachers play an important role both in its introduction and in evaluating its uses. Pedagogical theories, including Amabile's Internal Motivation Hypothesis and Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, argue that students learn best when they are actively involved. With many educators seeking to 'flip' the classroom and make learning both central to the curriculum and visible to students, there is a current move towards adopting constructivist approaches and the use of blogs as reflective learning journals can help make the processes of learning explicit, both to teachers and learners. With the irresistible forces of globalisation permeating many aspects of students' lives, it is imperative that their education provides learners with the ability to work across cultures. Key to an understanding of how others work is the ability to analyse one's own cultural assumptions, and how these can foster or impede both individual and collaborative group work.

This presentation reviews international research on the use of blogs in education giving exemplars of best practice, and uses lessons learnt from case studies in the US and UK on the integration of blogs across a range of courses. Students use blogs in a variety of ways: as visual and reflective journals, to organise group projects, to share information, and to showcase their work. Both the problems encountered and successes enjoyed are presented using vignettes from the case study, to encourage a dialogue about how best to exploit the pedagogic potential of blogs to create a truly interactive academic culture.

Keywords:

Academic culture

Blogs

Constructivist learning

Intercultural communication

Learning Journals