

CCS Concepts:

Human Centred Computing (K.3 COMPUTERS AND EDUCATION ; K4 COMPUTERS AND SOCIETY)

Collaborative and social computing (K.3.1 Collaborative Learning ; K.3.2 Literacy ; K.4.2 Social issues - employment)

Collaborative and social computing theory, concepts and paradigms

Collaborative content creation ; Social networks ; Computer supported cooperative work ; Social media

Keywords: Curriculum Innovation; Digital Literacy; Collaborative Learning

Collaborative social learning: rewards and challenges in mainstream Higher Education

Workshop Proposal

This paper introduces our rationale for an innovative module called “Living and Working on the Web” where we have based the design and assessment on the principles of collaborative social learning. At the workshop we will present a model of best practice that we have derived from synthesis of relevant literature and a content analysis of the students’ blogs.

One of the problems facing this type of curriculum innovation is the difficulties faced when scaling up such modules to very large student groups. To date, the single largest cohort has been 45 students. It is therefore also the intention of the presenters to engage the attendees in a discussion of how a module such as this could be feasibly extended into far larger cohort groups.

Background

Throughout the ages new technologies have regularly shaped, and been shaped by, society as they co-evolve over time. The World Wide Web has been one such transformative technology which has prompted educators to reassess teaching, learning and literacy in light of its affordances. New pedagogies have evolved (e.g. Networked Learning, Goodyear, 2002, 2005; Connectivism, Downes, 2005, 2006, 2007 and Siemens, 2004, 2005, 2008) alongside more established ones (e.g. Situated Learning and Communities of Practice, Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger et. al., 2002), and there has been a new focus on Digital Literacy as a result (e.g. Pegrum, 2011; JISC Design Studio, 2011).

In addition, the evolution of Web 2.0, Social Media and distributed information has led to a “*shift towards more diffused creative participation*” (Gillen & Barton, 2014, p.10). This has resulted in the recognition of issues such as the authenticity of the learning experience; student autonomy and self-directed learning; peer interaction, collaboration and review; creativity; and self-reflection as significant in Higher Education module design. For example, the [NMC Horizon Report](#) (2014) identifies “online, hybrid and collaborative learning” and “social media use in learning” as the key short term trends that are accelerating change in Higher Education:

*“Higher education is now in a position to shift its curricular focus to ensure learning environments align with the engagement of creator students and foster the critical thinking skills needed to fuel a **creator society**. Courses and degree plans across all disciplines and institutions are in the process of changing to reflect the importance of media creation, design, and entrepreneurship.”*

Therefore, Higher Education module designers face a pressing need to explore innovative teaching, learning and assessment approaches. As JISC (2013) suggests, “*With raised student expectations, institutions need to develop innovative ways to deliver the curriculum to maintain a high level learning experience. Technology has a key role to play in many innovative learning experiences.*”

Flexible Learning at Southampton

The Flexible Learning Programme at the University of Southampton (originally called “Curriculum Innovation”) began in 2011. The aim was to better prepare graduates for their future by offering new choices and options on many study programmes, in recognition that the next generation of graduates will face future challenges

that have not yet been imagined, and take jobs that may still not even exist. The increasing pace of change is such that students will need to develop new knowledge and skills throughout their working life.

This innovative approach to curriculum design allowed opportunities for students to exercise choice and personalise their learning, if they wished to do so. One of the modules developed – and the subject of this paper – is titled Living and Working on the Web (#UOSM2008).

The “Living and Working on the Web” Module

The “Living and Working on the Web” module is premised by the notion that *“the most authentic journey is that by a group of people working together with technologies in explorations which are not wholly predetermined”* (Gillen & Barton, 2014, p.21). It aims to socialise students into the use of the Web as an instrument for learning, networking and enhancing their online profile through the tools and strategies that the Web makes available to individuals in their dual role as consumers and producers. The module aims to assist students to *“make the boundaries between school and authentic domains of life and work more permeable”* (Gillen & Barton, 2014, p.17) and avoid a situation where *“literacies acquired outside the classroom seem more and more relevant than those acquired within it”* (Pegrum, 2011).

Therefore, the module has a focus on developing digital literacies, including Print literacy, Hypertext literacy, Multiliteracy (visual-audio-video), Technical literacy, Search and Filter Literacy, Information literacy, Personal literacy, Network literacy, Participatory literacy, Digital Safety, and Remix literacy, among others (Pegrum, 2011). The module has now run 7 times for nearly 200 students so far, including two larger cohorts based in Singapore.

Module learning outcomes:

1. be proactive, confident and flexible adopters of a range of web and mobile technologies for personal, academic and professional use (Technical literacy)
2. use appropriate web and mobile technologies effectively to search for, store and curate relevant information (Information and Search/Filter literacies)
3. be equipped to reflect upon and critically evaluate the information obtained (Information literacy)
4. engage creatively and productively in relevant online communities (Remix literacy, Print literacy)
5. be familiar with the use of collaboration tools to facilitate networking, group work and project management (Network literacy, Participatory literacy)
6. be aware of the challenges inherent in ensuring online privacy and security (Digital Safety)
7. have developed appropriate communication skills for peer and tutor interaction within an ‘always on’ environment (Print literacy, Multiliteracies)

In order to provide an authentic learning environment as possible, the module combined online interaction, self-study and face-to-face support workshops. One of the key features of this module was the high level of interaction during which students were required to share their own insights and experiences for the benefit of the group as a whole (in a ‘blog-comment-reflect’ cycle), as a way of recreating the practices that occur online within informal knowledge networks and an evolving learning community.

The module also featured an innovative assessment plan with two distinctive areas of assessment:

- 50% of the marks are devoted to content which is largely provided by the students. They answer a set question relating to each of 5 topics on their blogs, comment on the work of at least 2 other students, and then write reflective summaries of the learning they achieved from reading the work of other students and interacting with them via comments. Marks are awarded both for the relevance and depth of understanding and sources, and for the extent of reflection and the appropriate use of digital media tools (e.g. images, video, audio, hyperlinks)
- 50% of the marks were linked to the development of the student’s own digital portfolio, which comprised the development of online presence and reflection on their learning and future plans for employment.

Students are provided with electronic feedback on their contributions to each topic within 2 days of its submission deadline. The first running of the module was presented as a case study at the QAA Enhancement and Innovation in HE Conference in June 2013, and the paper is [available on eprints](#). The slides have so far received over [14,000 views on Slideshare](#)

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