

2011 UNIVERSITY ANNUAL LEARNING & TEACHING CONFERENCE

Changing Times: Refreshing the Learning & Teaching Strategy

Theme: A connected university

13:25 - 14:05

Promoting collaborative dialogue between students: is social networking an option?

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"I think the Learning & Teaching Strategy should harness the power of technology that is at students' fingertips."

Abstract:

This session will reflect on the possibilities offered by Educational Technology in helping us to develop a 'connected university', i.e. one that connects students, staff, the local or regional community and like-minded national and international universities.

Jay Cross (2007) points out that 80% of our learning is acquired informally, i.e. away from organized classes or workshops. It seems that this has a bearing on Bradwell's 2009 report for Demos 'The Edgeless University: why higher education must embrace technology' explores the issues impacting on Higher Education in terms of globalization, student diversity, funding, etc. A Postgraduate Training School module provided the opportunity to investigate the viability of supporting informal student learning using social media such as Twitter and tools such as Youtube. This learning is achieved both independently and collaboratively and may accelerate students' acquisition of employability skills such as critical thinking and selective use of technology.

Consideration of such an approach is opportune at a time when the University Learning and Teaching Strategy is being refreshed and when external drivers such as funding are having an impact on Universities' operations. In terms of a 'connected university' it is worth taking on board what Zaid Ali Alsagoff (eLearning manager at International Medical University (IMU) in Malaysia) says via Twitter 'In a connected campus, students traverse formal, informal, & virtual learning space towards learning outcomes in a seamless manner'.

At a basic day to day operational level the approach allows learning experiences such as tutorials to be held in real time. This is beneficial in terms of logistics such as student travel and room timetabling. Some students still value face to face contact with tutors and with each other so the approach must be used wisely and be specifically 'fit for purpose'. The session will discuss how 95 BA Primary Education students were given the choice of using either Twitter or an eBridge Forum as a vehicle for a tutorial in Semester 2 (2011). It is a work in progress but initial findings will be presented with a view to more widespread adoption if this trial is successful in meeting student need.

Pedagogically there is opportunity for students to engage collaboratively using contexts such as Problem Based Learning Scenarios. Expertise may be shared and learning accelerated as students communicate within protected or private groups set up in Twitter, etc. This seeks to address ethical and moral issues such as the targeting of students by undesirable users.

Techniques, strengths and challenges will be identified such as the risk of 'digital exclusion' (Cushman, M. and Klecun, E., 2006, p2) of some students thereby exacerbating the skills and qualifications gap.

Findings will be shared with colleagues both informally (possibly modelling the use of media, which seems appropriate) and through organised staff forums and workshops.

Cross, J. (2007) Informal Learning, San Francisco, Pfeiffer

Cushman, M. and Klecun, E. (2006) found at http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/24065/1/How_%28can%29_non-users_engage_with_technology_%28LSERO%29.pdf [date accessed 10 Nov 2010]