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Using A Blend of the Technical and the Traditional as a Tools to Encourage Interdisciplinary Collaboration

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Part 1, Abstract:

In an effort to enhance the student experience and reflect professional practice, I have woven new media use and non-traditional teaching and learning formats into my practice-based modules alongside traditional methods. The mixture of technology-based learning and traditional learning has been a positive change in my programme (cited in student surveys).

This research builds upon past projects of collaboration and disparate learning groups. Key to successful outcomes are the need on behalf of the facilitator to be fast-moving and versatile, as well as open-minded and experimental.

At the heart of all that I do as an academic, I hope to instill in students a desire for learning, as well as an ability to go into the world as critical and creative thinkers. Using technology as a tool to this end has its benefits and detractions, but implemented alongside traditional methods, it can be quite successful.

Part 2, Outline of paper entitled **Using A Blend of the Technical and the Traditional as a Tools to Encourage Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

Background

Although using the newest technology and being aware of the latest changes in the world can impress students, simply having shiny new machines on our campuses does not guarantee the best learning outcomes or student experiences. Having taught in several different environments, each with a different emphasis on technology (from online modules to the traditional art school model), I have found that it isn't solely the technology that matters.

Ironically, some of the most successful learning experiences have come out of a failure of equipment or a need to overcome a sterile teaching space with online outlets such as social media. Using open educational resources such as a blog and Facebook group page. According to Browne and Newcombe, 2009, these resources can contribute to a more constructivist and connectivist pedagogy, where teachers and learners co-create knowledge and understanding.

Technical ability is an important consideration of some courses, although the ability to use software is never a substitute for the ability to generate creative concepts and communicate among several audiences – these are far more important, and an emphasis for new hires among graduate candidates.

This research builds on earlier projects which focused on communities of practice across disciplines, which were previously difficult to facilitate due to geographical or psychological divides (students in the film department, for example, had been discouraged from doing any commercial work, which led to a disregard for creative collaboration with advertising students).

Special consideration is given to educational theory, with an emphasis on creating an environment of inclusion. A great deal of my work has also been influenced by Wenger, White and Smith's study of digital communities of practice.

The best results came forth from a mixture of traditional methods of teaching and learning opportunities alongside new methods such as social media in order to facilitate collaboration. In earlier research, I had staged an intervention in a physical space, which had mixed results. The online format, with myself acting as initial facilitator and then stepping back as observer only (and not contributor) meant that students were more likely to enter into a professional friendship and share sources of inspiration. Without setting up these opportunities, however, the collaboration was minimal over a two-year period.

Methods of measurement include surveys, interviews, observation and field notes, summative assessment of second-year module and formative assessment of third-year, final collaborative projects (part of a module entitled 'Advertising Collaborations').

In addition to using traditional teaching methods, students were required to collaborate via social media sites and non-traditional formats, requiring an adjustment in their skillset. The professional practice reflected in this endeavour means that students are not only able to communicate and build relationships face-to-face, but that they are able to communicate across a variety of media – this is essential in their field of study, but not often part of the academic curricula until recently.

The difficulties in initially coaxing students to step outside their comfort zone and deal with conflicting personalities and areas of speciality were offset with learning opportunities and professional friendships and a formation of communities of practice which appear set to run into the future. There were learning opportunities which occurred in addition to the specific technical or academic outcomes of the individual modules. The obstacles overcome in terms of challenges in communication meant that student identities were transformed and a great deal of interpersonal development occurred. The feedback thusfar is that students are much better prepared to work with clients and coworkers as a result, so that the long-term repercussions of this project are greater than expected.

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