

0215

Using Technology and International Learning Opportunities to Enhance the Student Experience and Reflect Professional Practice

Category: Student Experience

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Part 1, Abstract:

Having worked in international creative agencies, I have long been aware of the need for graduates in my field to be verstatile – they need to have an ability to adapt to different situations, such as presentating with or without technology, and in dealing with international clients and colleagues via new means of communication like Skype. The world is shrinking, and an agency in London or Australia may handle an American account. Communities of practice arise through social media, where individuals have never met, but need to communicate through a variety of formats.

In an effort to enhance the student experience and reflect professional practice, I have woven the use of new media, non-traditional formats and international projects into my practice-based modules. These efforts accompany traditional formats of delivery and environments, and the mixture of technology-based learning and traditional learning has been a positive change in my programme (cited in surveys).

Part 2, Outline of paper entitled **Using Technology and International Learning Opportunities to Enhance the Student Experience and Reflect Professional Practice**

Background

Before becoming a full-time academic and part-time practitioner a few years ago, I was an art director at several creative agencies, I had international clients and I needed to work with people across the globe. I worked with businesses ranging from non-profits to governmental agencies, to multi-national corporations that produced a variety of products and services. I also worked for a Fortune 100 company as in-house art director, as one of 90,000 employees worldwide, and our hub in-house agency was responsible for communicating with tens of millions of customers.

My own professional experiences have required an ability to speak across channels and media, to a variety of people in different cultures and time zones. The world has grown even smaller in the ensuing years, and I know that my students will need to be prepared to face the need to communicate effectively with different audiences in an ever-growing variety of formats.

To prepare them for these challenges, as well as helping them to become critical and creative thinkers, I have implemented a number of international projects and required that a variety of media were utilised in presenting their work and collaborating with peers in different countries.

The aim of this research is to address the challenges faced by academics in trying to facilitate interdisciplinary, collaborative learning of groups divided by subject expertise, personalities, time zones and cultural differences. I implemented and assigned a live industry brief for my students in Wales, working with a technology-based company in California. Students met the brief by working in groups, across disciplines and programmes.

An expectation of the project was that it would reflect professional practice and prepare students for the creative industry and life after university – advertising creatives must turn to subject-matter experts to produce their TV commercials, Smartphone apps, websites, and so forth.

Prior to the endeavour, this group of students had never experienced collaboration across disciplines within the university or on an international front. I hoped that this collaborative experience would help build confidence and form friendships and long-term relationships, as Gabelnick (1990) put forth.

The action research involved with this study saw a “problem” in the lack of international projects available to students, and also the lack of alternative media being used (e.g. Skype), which they would face even prior to entering the work force in their field, as

many job candidates must undergo a Skype interview before securing a final face-to-face interview.

Students needed to rely on virtual spaces and social media in order to connect with their client and potential audiences, and they needed to work around cultural differences, along with the difficulty that comes from dealing with clients/colleagues on the other side of the globe.

Ultimately, students presented their pitches to the client and myself whilst I was with the client in California, and students were in Wales, using Skype as the communication vehicle. It was necessary to use a blend of traditional and non-traditional teaching methods.

Research was gathered in the form of student and client surveys, field notes and journals, interviews with students and a final assessed presentation via Skype.

The challenge of working with a client they would never meet in person was a challenging prospect for my students, especially since many of them are from small provincial towns. But the learning opportunities provided (despite the challenge of coordinating schedules and a difference of six time zones) were immeasurable.

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