

The Seminar Transformed: Use of blogs to enhance face- to-face learning at different levels

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What is blogging in HE?

Stephen Downes (2004):-

- Linking to and commenting on websites
- Personal diary
- Political comment

Full of promise??

But!!

Marcus O'Donnell (2006) – many discovered that the
not lived up to expectations...

- What voice - too superficial?
- Don't do if not assessed
- Open to world – attract comments don't want
- Learning journals miss out group element
- Detailed comments by staff takes time
- Very few students actually blog

Wrong approach?

- Start by looking at what want to achieve in learning and teaching, NOT the tool first – can the BLOGGING TOOL do the job?
- Is this blogging?

Scottish degree system

- 4 years for UGs
- Years 1 and 2 non-specialised; taught by lecturers to large classes, with smaller tutorials led by PG tutors
- Years 3 and 4 specialised modules; taught by lecturers to small classes

Student backgrounds highly variable...

Blogging in School of Divinity

- Closed; not public
- Embedded within WebCT – started with University of Edinburgh tool; now WebCT's own tool
- Originally limited functionality – just text; now can add pictures, urls, etc



Standard blog practice

Primarily used to prime seminars
Used at all levels

- One student in charge of blog per week
- Class comments
- Assessed
- Generally lab-based introduction

Starting Approaches

HEA (History and Classics) grant

1st year:-

- PG tutor led
- Groups “gelled”
- Easier to draw out shyer students; challenge more confident
- Student feedback positive

2nd year:-

- Standards higher – less obviously enjoyable but still effective
- Discussion better than before used blogs
- See how well students understanding topic
- Students can't hide

3rd and 4th year

- Replaced commentary
- Discussion began at higher level
- No paper
- Observe changes in students arguments

Taught Masters

- Least successful
 - Not assessed
 - Technological issues
 - Range abilities
- But students still liked!

Spreading out

Mainly 3rd and 4th year courses

- Mixed reaction
- Success
 - Replaced essay with blog
 - More “airtime” and primed discussions
 - Revision material

- But

- Student feedback mixed – hate or like!!
- Good blogs but little comments
- Lecturer felt students did the minimum – going to use presentations in future
- Blog detracted as students felt done work already so no need to engage!

Student comments

- “good for revision”
- “better prepared for seminars”
- “had to work regularly”
- “reflect before seminar”
- “do from home”
- “actively engage before the seminar”

- Issues of the technology – WebCT down, can't edit after posting
- “difficult to engage with a computer”
- “became something had to do”
- “entries repetitive, little opportunity to interact”
- “didn't turn into discussion” online

Conclusions/Thoughts

- Works best 1st year – does it help with transition to HE from School?
- Is there a saturation point as to how many courses should use?
- Are staff taking on without total commitment?
- Level of discourse – more intellectual at higher levels?

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