In Another Instant: Focus and Interaction in Creative Arts Learning

Barbara Brownie, Marta Rabikowska, Jayne Smith and Rebecca Thomas
University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, UK
b.k.1.brownie@herts.ac.uk
m.rabikowska@herts.ac.uk
j.smith39@herts.ac.uk
r.thomas@herts.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper will look at several aspects of the use of social media within contemporary Higher Education. It will consider projects and attitudes initiated by staff from the School of Creative Arts at the University of Hertfordshire in which the already widespread technology of such media is employed, not just as a mere supplement to the use of orthodox classroom technology within teaching but as a productive resource in its own right. The use of the mobile phone as a teaching/learning device will be considered; the pros and cons of employing such technology in the classroom will be outlined and debated. In particular the instant sharing of photographic imagery will be looked at. Is this a way of opening up common debates or in fact little more than a distraction in the classroom?

The use of dual-screen technology within the classroom will also be examined for its potential to expand the possibilities of learning, again considering the positive and negative features of this medium.

The paper will also take into account, using a series of informal case studies, the perceptions and practical usage of such technology from the point of view of the student user. Is the user's identity determined by their extensive use of this technology or does it merely play only a minor part in the forming of identity as such? Can the classroom use of such technology expand the possibilities for learning and teaching into new pedagogical domains, or does it simply enable already-established exchanges to be carried out by other means? How does student familiarity and ease with services such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook contribute to or effect their sense of self and the possibilities of its development and expansion? Student response and selfhood are complicated issues worthy of further examination.

Key words: Dual-screen, Mobile, Interaction, Instantly, Creative

Introduction

The value of mobile devices in classrooms is a hotly debated, with some sources viewing mobile photos and tablets as a distraction which adversely affects achievement (Doward, 2015), and others embracing students' ownership of mobile devices as an opportunity for new modes of student-led learning (Beskow and Deb, 2013). In the classroom, social media use can bridge the divide between formal and informal learning, thereby catering for different learning styles and offering a more inclusive learning experience (Dabbagh and Kitsantas, 2011, p. 4). Making the most of a technology already available to the mass of students would be to activate its potentially immense value as an educational tool, one that may be yet more fruitfully exploited in the classroom in the years ahead.

This paper presents three case studies from Fashion, Music and Photography, at HE levels 4 and 5, in which mobile devices contributed to blended learning activities. Mobile devices were employed in Fashion workshops in support of patter-cutting and product assembly demonstrations, in Photography seminars to enable image sharing and critiques via Instagram, and on gallery visits during which Music students were asked to Tweet their responses to art

exhibits. These case studies found that blended learning within workshops, classrooms and galleries can:

- Enable students to define the pace and focus of their own learning;
- Collaboratively build archives for future use as study aids and as a resource for future teaching projects
- Enable and enhance collaboration;
- Enliven classroom experiences;
- Engage with new audiences beyond tutors and peers.

A nonlinear learning experience

While formal, structured learning environments offer a linear learning experience, progressing at a pace defined by the tutor, students who access the same learning materials on individual devices are able to navigate back and forth at their own pace, thus creating a nonlinear learning experience (Robberecht, 2007, p. 59). Sherry Chen (2002, p. 449) distinguishes the 'self-directed' learning that may occur in hypermedia from the passive, 'pre-defined linear' learning that occurs elsewhere. Chen suggests that this opportunity for self-direction empowers learners to 'discover according to their own individual needs'. Scheiter and Gerjets (2007, pp. 287-8) list the various 'promises' or hypermedia learning environments including 'increased motivation', 'adaption to preferences and cognitive needs' and 'affordances for active… information processing [which] may support a deeper processing' of learning materials. While these advantages are recorded in e-learning environments (Robberecht, 2007), they may also offer alternative and supplementary learning experiences in classrooms and workshops, where students may seek to balance guided and independent learning in a dual-screen experience.

In this dual-screen environment, in which students are exposed to learning materials on a primary screen or whiteboard, and additional or identical (but controllable) learning materials on their own mobile devices, the content of the two screens 'must compete for attention' (Holmes et al. 2012, p. 397). It is likely that students are accustomed to receiving information in this way in their own homes, as television viewers increasingly divide their attention between the television screen and an online device such as a table or mobile telephone. Indeed, Kathleen Hughes (2014) observes that the use 'or multiple screens has become second nature' to generations identified as 'Generation Y' (born after 1977) and 'millennials'.

Though there is evidence that 'cognition can become overloaded' when multiple screens present conflicting or unrelated information (p. 398), when the content of the two devices is related, this form of split-attention has been found to reduce cognitive load and thereby facilitate learning (Hsu et al. 2012, p. 159). In a classroom or workshop, content on the mobile device may be synchronised to the content of the primary screen, insofar as it may be offered as part of a holistic set of learning materials for the taught session. The materials intended for the mobile device may mirror or enhance those on the primary screen. Crucially, the ability to travel back and forth through learning materials at a self-directed pace enables students to dedicate more time to particular elements when necessary to improve their individual understanding, and hence build more solid foundations for future learning. Moreover, the ability to return to previous content in the learning path provides opportunity for revision and reinforcement.

Scheiter and Gerjets (2007, p. 285) propose that nonlinear learning materials are of particular value for 'adaptive instruction'. In the Art and Design learning environment, in which skills and concepts are applied differently in accordance with each learner's individual (and sometimes self-defined) aims, the learner's ability to focus learning by controlling navigation through learning materials enables them to tailor content to suit the demands of an individual project.

Our first case study takes place during pattern-cutting and product assembly workshops for BA(Hons) in Fashion levels 4 and 5. The approach involves an asynchronous combination of learning tools and technologies hosting learning materials such as videos, animated visuals, quizzes and text. This approach to learning implements the optimum combination of tools to assist with the delivery of this discipline to support a self-paced, self-directed learning and promote independence as an aptitude. It capitalized on the mixed range of students' abilities in a class and the students could choose their preferred mode of delivery whereby some students learn this discipline through a more visual approach and others favour a learning method which has a theoretical focus.

An understanding of pattern cutting and garment assembly is an essential knowledge that will allow fashion students to translate design ideas into reality. Mastery of the skills and intricacies of this subject area can be difficult to acquire by reading and lectures alone, therefore an understanding of this crucial subject is gained by visual demonstrations illustrating essential techniques such as drafting patterns, manipulating a pattern, to introduce flare, sewing a dart, inserting a zip, applying facings and waistbands, etc. Students usually become confident in these skills by directly observing demonstrations of the various assembly techniques, supervised practicing and repetition within workshops. Previously, demonstrations had taken place in small groups, and the whole demonstration repeated several times for large class sizes. While these repeated demonstrations took place, it was difficult for the lecturer and technician to give individual attention to each student.

These techniques were captured using a simple digital camera to record the sequence of steps for each essential task. During a class, a planned or impromptu live demonstrations were given using the camera and projected onto the large screen and subsequently transferred to the VLE which the students can access from their smart phone, tablet, or laptop, providing an opportunity to demonstrate intricate tasks in a level of detail that can normally only be acquired by one to one tuition. After the production of the videos showing each task, the videos were also supplemented with written steps giving students an additional reference source. Animated PowerPoint presentations embedded with video clips were also successfully used showing step-by-step instructions in pattern drafting and manipulation. The animation tool in PowerPoint which successfully enables a pattern draft to be delivered in step by step tasks enabling the students to see the pattern draft develop.

These resources were made available to students, for use within the studio and later as study manuals. Each of these video recordings has become a library resource which enables students in later years to draw upon knowledge, techniques and skills gained in earlier levels of their studies. Infrequently used skills and techniques will become rusty therefore the video resources have become a visual reference and revision tool allowing the student to rejuvenate these cognitive skills.

Transforming Galleries into Classrooms with Social Media

Creative Arts study at HE level is defined in part by the requirement for students to demonstrate 'conceptualisation and critical thinking' (SEEC, 2010, p. 9), and to understand the relationship between theory and practice. Gordon Wells (1990, as cited in Cartolari et al., 2013, p. 161) observes that it can be difficult for students to appreciate how to critically engage with practice unless they 'participate jointly in reading and writing events with their teachers or more competent peers'. Through the use of Twitter and other social media, the 'internal activit[y]' of critical engagement is 'externalized', so that students are given insights into their peers and tutors reactions to examples of practice.

Monica Rankin (2009) has found the use of Twitter in a classroom a valuable means of giving students a voice when class sizes are large. Rankin's 'Twitter Experiment', in which history students were asked to tweet during lectures, encouraged wider participation among students,

and made more efficient use of classroom's time as students were able to tweet comments simultaneously. Megan Malone (cited in Rankin, 2009) observes that three or four students typically dominate classroom discussions, whereas when students are invited to tweet a significantly larger proportion of the class become actively involved in discussions. Following the class, the tweets provided students with an archive of key terms and ideas that Rankin's students 'were able to use as a guide for further study. Rankin's use of Twitter continued during a taught session from which she was absent, but able to maintain virtual presence by contributing to the class' discussion remotely. This ability to maintain a discussion when staff or students are dispersed over a large area makes Twitter an ideal tool for gallery visits and study-days.

In our second case study, level 5 BA(Hons) Music Composition students attended four London galleries on one day, and were asked to tweet about relationship between art and music in response to the contents of the exhibitions. The expectation was that Music students would identify conceptual affinities between music and modern art through the act of physical experience of the exhibition and the act of simultaneous tweeting. The role of Twitter was meditative and regulatory at the same time: by being asked to tweet from each gallery, students were requested to verbalise their physical experience in a concise formula of 140 characters, share it with others, and produce an instantaneous response from anyone present on Twitter and interested in the same issue. The role of the tutor in this exercise was to facilitate communication by contributing her own tweets, using the pre-determined hashtags: MusicComp and MusicTask. Following the gallery visit, the students were asked to produce a podcast, which would engage with their main thoughts articulated in the Twitter activity from the day and in the aftermath of the gallery experience. While final podcasts were formally assessed, the Twitter feeds were not, rather they served the purpose of building an archive of key issues to be addressed in the podcast.

It is noteworthy to observe how discussion organically developed in the students' tweets, and how this later informed their podcasts. An initial tweeted response from one student prompted a tweeted reflection from another student, and a chain reaction emerged. This discussion formed the basis for the structure and argument of the student's final podcast. Those students who fully engaged with the Twitter exercise applied this shared knowledge confidently, using different parts of the Twitter exchange to their own benefit, as if for them the border between 'my tweet' and 'your tweet' did not exist. Tutors' tweets were also incorporated into the students' responses: re-adapted, re-adjusted, re-tweeted and re-composed in response to the live exchange of ideas. In that sense they became devoid of their original authoritative and authorial value, which class-based tutors' statements are believed to possess. All tweets, written by tutors and students, were treated as a jointly produced live archive of knowledge.

Social Media Collaboration

When students are invited to actively participate or even lead classroom sessions via mobile devices, the students engage in the kind of information gathering and problem solving that would ordinarily occur outside of the classroom. Dan Berrett (2012) describes a process of 'flipping' learning activities that conventionally occur inside and outside of the classroom. Students take responsibility for educating their peers as well as themselves, participating in the kind of activities that are 'typically thought to be homework, solving problems with their professors or peers, and applying what they learn to new contexts'.

One of the many benefits of 'flipping', as identified by Berrett, is that student's misconceptions can be corrected immediately, through staff and peer 'intervention' (Lerner, 2010, as cited in Cartolari et al., 2013 p. 161), before they interfere with a students' learning path or affect his or her ability to successfully complete an assessment. When information is shared via social media, it becomes visible to peers and tutors and thereby undergoes a peer-review process in which it can be confirmed if accurate or corrected if inaccurate. Similarly,

peer critique via social media enables students to gather advice on the improvement of their work before summative assessment.

The final case study involves the development of a collaborative project undertaken by students in the 1st year of BA (Hons) Photography. The theme of the project was 'noticing', and was developed with the aim of prompting students to be more observant of their everyday surroundings, with particular reference to the act of noticing within the classroom. Students were required to work as a group compiling a video from footage shot using their mobile devices. During the development of the project, students were asked to use their mobile phones to produce photographic images and 10-second videos, working quickly so they used the medium as a kind of notebook. Students were invited to use their devices to contribute to a group project using a shared Instagram account and Tumblr blog. Students took photographs using their mobile phones inside and outside of the classroom, and were able to share them instantly via Instagram, and then later used Tumblr to record more detail about processes and events. Permission for the deployment of such aids to teaching was sought from the students and all other person's involved, and clear guarantees that the recorded material will not be misused in future, was given by the institution.

Given the widespread usage of Instagram by students, using this technology as a teaching tool with respect to 'noticing' seemed a readymade, and potentially very interesting opportunity to foreground and encourage the act of noticing itself. Bringing this complex activity to the attention of the students is increasingly important in a world practically drowning in the photographic image, including all those images and fragments of images distributed through the Internet and via other digital forms. Students loaded images onto the site so that they could be more easily shared and critiqued. This gave the students a helpful distance from images that might otherwise have remained at the level of merely personal snapshots.

Instagram was employed not merely as a photographic record, but also as so as to help students to become articulate about the conventions involved in using mobile phone cameras, as well as the general politics and ethics of the taking of photographs. Photographs taken in this context by the students involved could then be openly discussed in class in such a way as to promote a greater awareness of both photography's effects, and what is generally involved in the operation of noticing. That is, of becoming aware of one's environment and the influence of photography upon it. The instantaneity of sharing photos via social media also encouraged students to take a more playful attitude towards their work.

Issues and Conclusions arising from the Case Studies

The case studies outlined above revealed that the effectiveness of these blended learning activities varies depending on students' previous familiarity with social media. Fashion students seemed comfortable and confident with the use of mobile devices, and it became evident that blended learning is perceived as the norm within this group of students. Of the Music Composition students who took part in the third case study, over 80% had previously used social media for personal use, but many were unaccustomed to using it for research and studying. Perhaps as a result of their unfamiliarity with using social media in this way, some students felt distracted by the act of tweeting while visiting exhibitions, and opted instead to tweet during breaks or after the end of the study-day. Not all students were accustomed to expressing their thoughts within the 140-character constraint imposed by Twitter, and chose to tweet photographs of the artworks to illustrate, clarify or enhance their written observations and reflections.

Music students appeared to be most confortable tweeting about familiar ideas and subjects. In the unfamiliar surroundings of art galleries, Music students tended to articulate what they felt about the art in relation to what they had previously known and experienced. The layout and the organisation of the exhibits attracted most responses. The students found evident

connections between the physical space in which art was sited and the problem of space in music. Apart from abstract concepts ascertained in relation to art, the students also asked questions about the authorship and marketing of the exhibitions, which questions led them to discussing their own professional identity and how it is 'exhibited' before the audience.

In all three case-studies, activity on mobile devices was not directly assessed, but contributed to learning that was later assessed in a formal submission. Some case studies indicate that the application of social media is often interpreted as a distraction from the goal of the activity (Wheeler 2009; Roblyer et al., 2010; Lee & McLoughlin 2011). For Music students, knowing that the tweets would not be assessed discouraged some students from fully engaging with the Twitter activity. Nevertheless, those of them who did engage in tweeting throughout the gallery day have produced interesting podcasts, underpinned by their subjective, but clearly formulated conceptual statements, enriched by instantaneous feedback from others. Photography students recognised their peers' comments as formative feedback, and used it constructively to improve their work for assessment.

The use of social media, for sharing image and text based information, exposed students to audiences beyond their immediate peers. The two hashtags used by Music students, MusicTask and MusicComp, attracted attention from other Twitter users who found the hashtags relevant to their professional or personal or interests. Some students admitted that connecting with other, unknown people was a challenge which they were not prepared for at that stage. Similarly, the use of Instagram exposed Photography students' photographs to an other Instagram users. Using hash-tags alongside their images made the subject students' are tagging available to anyone using Instagram, who had the ability to share the images with third parties, thus exposing the students' work to unknown audiences.

References

Beckstow, D. and Deb, A. K. (2013), 'Increasing learning with iPads and social media,' Center for Teaching Excellence, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY. Available at: http://www.usma.edu/cfe/Literature/Beskow_13.pdf (accessed 23 May 2015)

Berrett, D. (2012) article 'How flipping the classroom can improve the traditional lecture', *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* February 19th, 2012

Cartolari, M., Carlino, P. and Colombo, L. M. (2013), 'Reading nd note taking in monological and dialogical classes in the social sciences,' *Australia Journal of Teacher Education,* vol. 28, no. 6, pp. 159-183.

Chen, S. (2002), 'A cognitive model for non-linear learning in hypermedia programmes', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 449-460.

Dabbagh, N. and Kitsantas, A. (2011), 'Personal learning environments, social media, and self-regulated learning: A natural formula for connecting formal and informal learning,' *Internet and Higher Education,* vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 3-8.

Doward, J. (2015), 'Schools that ban mobile phones see better academic results', *The guardian* [online], 16 May. Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/may/16/schools-mobile-phones-academic-results (accessed 23 May 2015)

Holmes, M., Josephson, S. and Carne, R. E. (2012), 'Visual attention to television programmes with a second-screen application', *ETRA '12: Proceedings of the Symposium on Eye Tracking Research and Applications*, pp. 397-400

Hsu, J., Chang, T. and Yu, P. (2012), 'Learning effectiveness and cognitive loads in instructional materials of programming language on single and dual screens', *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology,* vol. 11, issue 2, pp.

Hughes, K. (2014), 'The multi-screen experience', *Irish Academy of Management Conference.* Available at: http://works.bepress.com/kathleen_hughes/6 (accessed 21 May 2015)

Lee, M. J. W., & McLoughlin, C. (Eds.) (2011), *Web 2.0-based e-learning: Applying social informatics for tertiary teaching*, Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

Lerner, D. (2001). Leer y escribir en la escuela: Lo real, lo posible y lo necesario. [Reading and writing in school: The real, the possible, and the necessary]. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Rankin, M. (2009), 'Some general comments on the "Twitter Experiment"'. Available at :http://www.utdallas.edu/~mar046000/usweb/twitterconclusions.htm (accessed 22 May 2015)

Robberecht, R. (2007), 'Interactive nonlinear learning environments', *Electronic journal of e-learning,* vol. 5, issue 1, pp. 59-68.

Roblyer, M. D., McDaniel, M., Webb, M., Herman, J. and Witty, J. (2010), 'Findings on Facebook in higher education: A comparison of college faculty and student uses and perceptions of social networking sites,' *Internet and Higher Education*, vol. 13, issue 3, pp. 134-140.

Scheiter, K. and Gerjects, P. (2007), 'Learner control in hypermedia environments', *Educational Psychology Review,* vol. 19, issues 3, pp. 285-307.

SEEC (2010), *SEEC Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education.* Available at: http://www.seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/seec-files/SEEC%20Level%20Descriptors%202010.pdf (accessed 23 May 2015)

Wells, G. (1993), 'Text, talk and inquiry: Schooling as semiotic apprenticeship,' paper presented at *International Conference on Language and Content*. Hong Kong, December. Available at: http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED371618.pdf (accessed 23 May 2015)

Wheeler, S. (2009), 'Student Perceptions of Immediacy and Social Presence in Distance Education,' in A. Szucs, A. Tait, U. Bernath and M. Vidal (Eds.), *Distance and E-learning in Transition*, London: Wiley.