

Enabling digital participation in Higher Education

What determines the uses of technology in classrooms?

Background

There is often a rush to adopt new technologies, primarily because of their 'newness', rather than as a result of a considered analysis of how they assist in the learning and teaching process.

We explored the role of new media and web 2.0 technology in the delivery of teacher training at Birmingham City University. Our study highlights the problematic nature of imposing a set of normative uses of technology within teaching and learning; we concluded that the role of the student voice should be foregrounded in determining the best use of technological innovation.

Theoretical framework

Digital participation: it's not just about access. A range of social factors impact upon uptake of technology in learning & teaching (Gärdenfors & Johansson 2005).

User-agency: innovation must offer students a sense of ownership. Students must have the opportunity to take on a self-regulating role in the learning process where they understand that they are in control of their learning (Sandford & Richardson, 1997).

Soft determinism: technology does not determine its own uses, uses are negotiated (White 1978).

Neutral technology: it is difficult to judge the 'goodness' of a technology outside of the purpose for which it was created. (Salomon 1993)

Discourses of technology: ideologies of progress, newness (Fuery 2009).

The technological imaginary: technologies are understood in relation to what exists, and what we hope to gain from them (Lister et al 2009).



Case Study: Flip camcorder

Previous attempts to use video for reflection in teacher training floundered because equipment was cumbersome; Flip camera technology overcomes this problem. Trainee teachers were provided with a Web 2.0 solution to share video for reflective practice. They found the technology easy to use, but did not use it as we suggested.

Determinants affecting usage:

- Ethical and child protection issues;
- ICT barriers - slow PCs and Internet speeds;
- Time pressures;
- Disruptive to classroom environment;
- Already use other methods;
- Fear of negative peer review.

Undirected uses:

- Creation of visual aids for teaching;
- Personal playback of practice;
- Playback of group activities to the class;
- Visualising aspects of practice;
- Peer assessment for school children;
- A resource for the children themselves to use.



New approaches for new challenges

This project is a collaboration between colleagues in education and media & cultural research at Birmingham City University. Find out more about our work: <http://www.interactivecultures.org>.

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