

Title: Using Online Asynchronous Discussions for Peer-Feedback: a Case-Study

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Abstract:

The omnipresence of collaborative learning in British Higher Education has been made possible partly by the emergence over the past couple of decades of a vast array of digital tools. Web 2.0 in general, and social media in particular, have recently demonstrated the possibilities offered by the Internet and specifically its effects on participatory and informal learning (O'Reilly, 2005). Their applications have proved to have particular relevance to skill-based learning, notably to language learning (Thomas, 2009).

The proposed presentation situates itself within the third main conference theme: *Contextualisation of didactic action*, and specifically tackles the angle of *conception, setting up and evaluation of tasks and of language teaching/learning systems*.

Firstly, this presentation proposes to examine the set-up and implementation of a social networking website serving both academic and social purposes in a university language department. The choice of platform will be discussed, highlighting some of the limitations encountered when considering options such as the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Moodle and the social networking site Facebook as possible platforms. Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) are also briefly discussed as a complement to VLEs. Some of the technicalities of the creation of a safe and productive online learning environment will also be addressed, in order to provide practitioners with a comprehensive, useful and easily accessible solution.

A rationale for introducing social media in undergraduate teaching will be provided, highlighting some of the possible benefits of raising awareness of networked learning among students (Couros, 2011). The rationale also draws on Warschauer's (2006) definition of digital literacies and how using Online Asynchronous Discussions (OADs) may help learners develop some of the core components of these literacies, in particular Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) literacy.

Secondly, the presentation will present the results of a case-study conducted with a final year undergraduate translation English to French translation class between September 2011 and

March 2012. The study examines students' attitudes towards and engagement with a weekly constructivist learning task consisting of sharing part of their work and giving peer-feedback to their course mates.

The process is aimed at providing participants with a feeling of ownership over their learning processes, allowing them to move away from the need for external legitimacy. This leads to redefine their role as learners, as well as that of the tutor (Levin & Wadmany, 2008). Social media is used with the intention of enhancing the participants' critical thinking, communication skills and digital literacy, three factors contributing directly towards undergraduate employability.

The study was conducted over a period of seven months with a group of 25 participants. Data collection was carried out using three questionnaires (preliminary, mid-stage and final) combining open and closed questions. Statistical representation of the participants' engagement and perceptions of usefulness will be provided and compared with individual contributions to the online discussions. A qualitative analysis of a selection of contributions will be also be included, drawing on Elizabeth Murphy's (2004) collaboration model. Early results highlight hurdles to success relating to the impact of non-assessment of the task and the subsequent impact on student motivation.

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