Bringing Your Classes Alive!

Abstract

To ensure high quality teaching and learning, Anglia Ruskin University has been investing heavily in new technologies for the classroom this past year, as well as updating our productivity software and extending the functionality of our virtual learning environment (VLE). As the Internet is becoming increasingly ubiquitous, mobile learning provides opportunities to support our students in new and increasingly agile ways. At the same time, there are numbers of social Web 2.0 technologies available to provide our students with engaging collaborative learning tools when appropriated for this purpose. Familiarity with these technologies extends the repertoire of learning opportunities colleagues can provide for their students.

The ‘Bringing Our Classroom Alive’ workshop focused on introducing colleagues to a number of classroom, mobile and online technologies and gave them hands-on experience with mobile Web 2.0 tools.

Keywords

classroom technology, Web 2.0, collaborative learning
Introduction

Research findings (Educause, 2010) indicate that academics are making little use of these tools, yet students increasingly have smartphones (with Internet and video recording functionality), thereby increasing the opportunities for interactive and collaborative learning significantly. At a time when competition for students is increasing, the New Horizon (2011) reports that ‘mobile offerings are quickly becoming a selling point for prospective students considering educational options’ (New Media Consortium, 2011, p. 13).

The ‘Bringing Our Classrooms Alive!’ workshop gave colleagues a chance to try out Twitter for feedback, Google docs for shared note taking and Delicious social bookmarking for sharing favourite resources. These were available to anyone with a mobile device, although an iPad was also provided on each table. Demonstrations included word clouds via Wordle.net, using the iPad for taking and emailing photos, as well as a presentation tool. A live graphing session using Excel demonstrated how our participants’ mobile/technology use compares to the Educause US figures (see figure 1 and table 1).

The world is not standing still. Digitally literate lecturers are exploring the scope of new technologies for learning with dynamic effect. Professor Michael Wesch’s Digital Ethnography students, for example, use video to capture their ethnographies as part of their course assessment (Wesch, 2011).

As digital literacy becomes a key employability skill, students are increasingly required to be:

- able to handle multiple, diverse information sources and media,
- proficiently mediating their interactions with social and professional groups using an ever-changing and expanding range of technologies and
- able confidently to use digital technologies to reflect on, record and manage their lifelong learning’ (Oxford Brookes University, 2011, p. 1).

It is clear that students are becoming increasingly mobile. The ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and IT (2010) found from a survey of more than 36,000 students that 46% had desktop computers, while 84% had laptops; 13% had netbooks; 63% had web-enabled handheld devices; and 3% had a dedicated e-book reader. This profile continues to shift rapidly. Where 35.5% of students didn’t own or plan to own web-enabled mobile devices in 2009, this figure had decreased to 25% of students by 2010. The number of students who owned a web-enabled mobile was 33% in 2009. Power users represented 25% of all respondents. A year later, students who owned a web-enabled mobile had increased from a third to nearly a half (49%) of all respondents and of these 42% reported being power users.

The UK longitudinal study by Bradley and Holley (2010) corroborates these findings. They report that 50% of students had wifi-enabled mobiles in 2009, up from 22% the year before. Their study also found that 86% of students were able to capture video on their mobiles and 60% of students stated that it would be useful (31%) or very useful (29%) to access learning materials from their mobile.

This suggests that the door to mobile learning is now opening increasingly rapidly, with the VLE a potential portal for sharing video and audio. The scope is there also to work collaboratively using a range of tools available for no cost via our students’ mobile devices.

![Figure 1: Personal Use of Technology by 22 Anglia Ruskin Colleagues in June 2011 (Internet = Mobile Internet-Enabled Device)](image-url)
Anglia Ruskin Classroom Refit

Effective use of learning technology is also important to our students. The 2010 classroom refit has ensured that the Helmore building has been fitted with lecterns. By September 2011, the Postgraduate Medical Institute (PMI), and all classrooms in both the Lord Ashcroft Buildings and the Marconi building were fitted with new lecterns, screen/s, 3D projectors, interactive white board functionality, the Extron device manager and a blue ray DVD player. The Sawyers building will also be upgraded in 2012.

Table 1: The Range of Technologies Used in the Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Nos</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desktop Computer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netbook</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet-capable handheld device</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-reader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: The 400 Seater PMI Lecture Hall

To assist colleagues to effectively use these technologies, Anglia Learning and Teaching has prepared a range of support materials on its website (http://www.lta.anglia.ac.uk/using-av-technology/). These include a list of rooms with the equipment they contain (www.lta.anglia.ac.uk/assets/Uploads/howTo/equipmentstatus.pdf), a list of nine short videos showing how to use these technologies (see figure 3) (http://www.lta.anglia.ac.uk/av-howdoi/), as well as resource pages including how to embed audio in your teaching: (http://www.lta.anglia.ac.uk/using-audio).
Online Technologies

The iPad is an example of a touch screen handheld device emerging on the market that provides quick (wifi) Internet access and a range of functionality that supports collaboration and sharing. Touchpad technology is becoming increasingly popular and provides opportunities for real time learning. To illustrate the potential of synchronous collaboration, the iPads were set up with accounts to Twitter (live messaging), Delicious (social bookmarking) and Google docs (for collaborative writing). In case it is of interest to colleagues, the following information links to each account, with passwords provided for use to enable easy exploration of these tools.

Using Twitter (#inov8_alive)
test account login: inov8_alive psw: 28june

140 characters can be a useful amount of space for students to give feedback or summarise what they’ve learned, and many students have Twitter on their mobile devices. By creating a class account and/ or using the hashtag #, tutors can provide students with a text ‘channel’ to contribute. Tutors can even tweet privately with their class if they prefer by using a GroupTwitter account. Subscribing to educational professionals’ Twitter accounts allows you to access their emerging insights and key resources. Alternately, using the hashtag # and the account name or a keyword aggregates all the tweets using the same term into a stream. For the conference we used #inov8_alive (for Mac users – the hash is generated by using the fn, alt and 3 keys simultaneously).

Delicious Social Bookmarking
test account url: www.delicious.com/anglialt login: anglialt pswd: 28june

Although keeping bookmarks online via tools such as Delicious is a common practice for those colleagues who like to keep track of key online resources over the long term, tutors might like to consider whether a social bookmarking account would also be useful for their students and colleagues in their pathway and module teams so that everyone can contribute any useful resources they find. Adding ‘tags’ allows these resources to be searched easily. For this reason, a Delicious account named AngliaLT was provided to illustrate how easily a range of ICT-CPD related links can be aggregated and shared. Social bookmarking tools such as Delicious often have a plugin that can be added to the web browser to make the bookmarking process as simple as possible.

Using Google for Collaborative Writing
test account url: http://tinyurl.com/inov8alive1 login: anglialt pswd: 28june

Username: inov8alive Password: inov8alive11

Google docs provide free ‘cloud’ word-processing, spreadsheets and presentations tools. Although our VLE’s Shared documents folder allows students to collaboratively edit a document sequentially, Google docs allows a group of students to write collaboratively at the same time. One of the pedagogic
affordances of this is to allow students to compare and contrast their perspectives instantly and transparently or, alternately, to work as functional teams taking specific roles to work on different sections of the same document.

The easiest way to set this up is to create the document through the student's own or a class Google account and to share the link via email. The simplest and quickest way to do this is to select the option for it to be open to anyone who has the url.

Table Two
- students twitter interactively during lectures to give immediate feedback.
- tell students to turn their phones on!
- quizzes in teams
- find out why so many people are leaving Facebook? Is it a dyir community
- web surveys like survey monkey in the classroom
- web guests
- desktop sharing
- but - will the networks that we want to use for all these things stand up to the pressure?

Table Three
- test!
- How can we have iPods in the learning environment?
- How can we develop an app for students?
- We already use Symposium in the studies
- We use wondering microphones and clip mice for large cohort of students, allowing students to be heard in larger learning environments
- We link computers within the studio to allow students to download their assignments for peer review on the day of submission
- Students complete their module evaluation forms online with the studios - this provide a good response rate since the introduction of online evaluation
- Abuse during lectures with shared sessions?
- Share files with students via the wireless environment to discuss students' work?

Figure 4: An Extract of the Workshop Google Docs Synchronous Brainstorm

Conclusions
As the use of mobile technologies is rapidly increasing, colleagues are adopting these for their personal use at a similar rate as their students. However, for most this is not yet translating into their teaching practice. Exposure to these technologies is important – to familiarise colleagues with their affordances so they can feel confident to use them in their teaching practice.

Although the rate of change of technology is a barrier to adoption for busy colleagues (workshop feedback), a number of these tools are emerging as front-runners, stable and increasingly evidenced as enhancing learning. Knowing their affordances allows colleagues to discern ways of using them in their teaching to satisfy a range of purposes, including to deepen students' learning (Biggs, 1999). An example of this is using Twitter to engage students in summarising the previous session at the start of the class.

References


