

Hype or hope?

*Using a course blog
to encourage
critical reflection
by students*

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If possible, find some genial friend, who will read the book along with you, and will talk over the difficulties with you. *Talking* is a wonderful smoother-over of difficulties.

When I come upon anything—in Logic or in any other hard subject—that entirely puzzles me, I find it a capital plan to talk it over, *aloud*, even when I am all alone.

Rationale: needs

- From review of curriculum and ICT use
- Programme and module specs
- Critical reflection (and all that...)
- **Media convergence in journalism**
- Other pressures and priorities

Quality standards

QAA: Quality Assurance Agency for HE

- critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data
- critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights
- independent learning ability required for continuing professional development

Critical reflection needed

“reflect critically on the practice of journalism”

“critically evaluate issues in contemporary journalism”

“synthesise information from a range of sources”

“manage the implications of complex ethical dilemmas”

Where’s the critical reflection?

- More implicit than explicit?
- Assessment?
- Relevance?
- Modularised?
- Integration of theory and practice?

Why online?

- **Relevance for journalism**
- **Educational context**
 - E-Learning
 - E-Portfolios (PDPs, lifelong learning...)
 - Pedagogical framework
 - Pressures of numbers, timetable, \$\$\$
- **Encourage ‘thinking digitally’?**

Blog learning benefits *claimed*

- **Reflection and analysis**
 - in-built feedback system (comments)
 - contextualised learning (links)
- **Forum for critical thinking**
 - points ‘published’ and queried/discussed
- **Collaborative, student-centred**
- **Active learning, higher-order thinking**

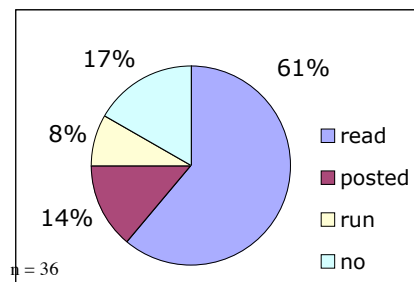
Ferdig & Trammel, 2004

-- (Social) constructivist approach?

Practical priorities

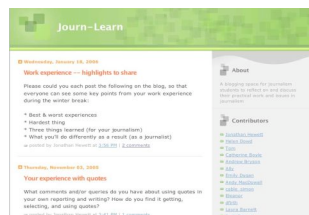
- **IT access and support**
- **Cost**
- **Time required**
- **Staff input**
- **Ease of use – familiarity**
- **Relevance**

Students are familiar with blogs



“A blogging space for journalism students to reflect on and discuss their practical work and issues in journalism”

- **Single blog**
- **All students able to contribute**
- **Newspaper Journalism Masters / Diploma**
- **Pilot, then full**



What to blog about – 1

- ✓ **Your experience(s) as a journalist, primarily in your practical work**
 - ▶ *how it went, frustrations and successes;*
 - ▶ *how it relates to points raised in teaching sessions;*
 - ▶ *tips and suggestions;*
 - ▶ *what you have learned.*

What to blog about – 2

- ✓ **Published articles (or broadcasts etc), particularly to highlight points relevant to what you are learning and putting in to practice**
 - ▶ eg intros, structure, accuracy, style, use of quotes, attribution, sources, headlines, use of visuals, other elements of content, different types of news story, news features, profiles...
 - ▶ Particularly useful to focus on what you find effective or not, and -- importantly -- why and how the reporter/writer/sub-editor/publication has achieved this (or failed to).
 - ▶ Possibly linking this to your own experience, too.

Assessment

- Min. 7 items (posts and/or comments)
- Length is less important than relevance
- Where possible, they should 'add value'
- *“This is where critical reflection comes in; critical not (necessarily!) in the sense of criticising/ disapproving but in the sense of reviewing, analysing and evaluating; 'unpacking' assumptions; challenging yourself and others; making connections, particularly with your own experience/work/ideas; and so on.”*
- cover a range of topics

Main areas of blog posts

- Practical experiences (eg interviewing)
- Published articles etc (plus links)
- Contemporary issues in journalism
- Moaning, mutual support, ideas
- Feed in from outside events
- Cross-course discussion
- Follow-up from in-class / assignments etc
- Useful feedback for me!

What to blog about – 3

- ✓ **Contemporary developments in journalism**
 - ▶ not simply to note these but to reflect critically on them, get beneath the surface, make connections etc.

The blog in figures

Pilot (7 weeks + 1)

- 14 students contributed
- 69 posts/comments in total
- range of 3–16 per student

Full-scale (11 weeks + 1)

- 45 students contributed
- 399 posts/comments (+ 39)
- range of 1–40 per student

Students' experience of the blog

From survey of students' experiences:

- Very few technical problems
- Useful and had learned from it
- More tutor input
- Preference for continuing blog, but not assessed

Worst things about the blog

- *Assessment: quota for posts / comments, topics specified*
- *Some posts too long*
- *Not enough dialogue / interaction*
- *Some people write rubbish*
– *using it for their egos?*

More best things...

- *It's catapulted me into the modern age. And I quite liked it!*
- *Idea exchange forum --> collaborative support = learning from each other*
- *You can ask fellow students for advice/reassurance*

Possible changes for next time

- **Tutor role – more input?**
- **Assessment**
- **Encourage reluctant contributors**
- **Greater integration across programme**
- **Journalism blogs**
- **! Privacy and plagiarism ?**
- **More links and multimedia content**
- **Individual blogs with RSS feeds?**

Best things about the blog

- *continuing discussions from the day, having time to reflect on issues*
- *useful for sharing practical information*
- *setting up dialogue between students*
- *encouraging critical thinking*

Other spin-offs

- **Students started (or revived) own blogs**
- **Contributor to *The Guardian* arts blog**
- **'Diary of a journalism postgrad'**
- **Students' online newspapers**
- **Intro to online tools (RSS, deli.cio.us etc)**
- **Online / multimedia jobs**

Blogging Journalism Education -- <http://hackademic.net>

The screenshot shows a blog post on the website 'hackademic.net'. The page has a blue header with the site name and navigation links for 'home' and 'about'. The main content area features a post titled 'Using a blog to encourage critical reflection' dated June 26, 2007, by Jonathan Hewett. The post discusses the use of a blog for reflecting on practical journalism. To the right of the post is a search bar and an 'About...' section. At the bottom right, there is a calendar for June 2007.

June 2007						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	