Is twitter an appropriate tool to enhance engagement in HE?

Introduction

A reflective evaluation of teaching practice in the area of Social Welfare Law identified a lack of engagement and absence of contemporary tools in teaching. The evaluation identified recommendations for research into the use of social media in Higher Education and twitter was selected based on it’s focus on social interaction; with the intention of identifying whether its use would be appropriate in the HE environment.

The Method

A review of literature was completed, to establish current findings on the use of twitter in HE. This was justified as others had conducted detailed research so a full study was therefore unnecessary. As an emerging area, identification was required of a range of relevant pre-existing theories and research and contemporary discussion. The literature was critically analysed and evaluated in relation to pedagogic practice, learning spaces and their potential impact.

The Review

Pedagogically challenged

In a digitised society are traditional pedagogic approaches adequate or is a new type of pedagogy required? To answer this question, the pedagogic foundations of social learning require exploration and one or more of the identified pedagogic theories must underpin any implementation of learning tools.

- Traditionally, pedagogy is based in Instructivist or Constructivist theory; learners are instructed or they actively construct knowledge.
- A Constructivist approach is required, when using twitter as a learning tool, due to the active nature of social media.
- Social Constructivism identifies strength in a community of learning; thus lending itself to supporting engagement in an online learning community.
- Connectivism is mooted as a new ‘digital’ pedagogy, based on the dissemination of information across digital networks; however it appears only to progress existing theory rather than develop new theory.

Spaces without walls

Consideration must be given to the new learning space twitter creates.

- Traditional learning spaces are physical, constrained, spaces.
- Modern learning spaces must reflect learner needs and should encompass both online and physical environments.
- Learning spaces without boundaries require a shift in thinking and release of institutional control.
- Appropriate digital spaces must be methodically constructed, accommodating pedagogy, with learners ‘Scaffolded’ by institutions.

A messy chaos

Bryant suggests that learners lead messy chaotic lives, within which they also expect to learn.

- Learning spaces and pedagogy must be designed to work alongside other influences; they must be fluid rather than rigid.
- An appropriate pedagogy or space is likely to provide scaffolded learning, where learners are enabled to operate asynchronously.

Findings, Conclusions & Recommendations

- A social model of active learning must underpin the use of social media technologies and engaged learning; this should be coupled with the use of an appropriate digital learning space which is supported by institutional scaffolding.
- Fluidity in implementation is likely to be essential in order to encourage engagement when using any tool. Social media may lend itself well to this though further research is required to draw firm conclusions.
- Challenges in obtaining learner, colleague and institutional support are likely but can be addressed through providing an understanding of the theoretical and practical foundations.

Key References

- Siemens, G. (2006f). Fluidity in implementation is likely to be essential in order to encourage engagement when using any tool. Social media may lend itself well to this though further research is required to draw firm conclusions. [Online] Fluidity in implementation is likely to be essential in order to encourage engagement when using any tool. Social media may lend itself well to this though further research is required to draw firm conclusions. Available from: http://www.connectivism.ca [Accessed: 01/09/2014]
- Siemens, G. (2006g). A social model of active learning must underpin the use of social media technologies and engaged learning; this should be coupled with the use of an appropriate digital learning space which is supported by institutional scaffolding. [Online] A social model of active learning must underpin the use of social media technologies and engaged learning; this should be coupled with the use of an appropriate digital learning space which is supported by institutional scaffolding. Available from: http://www.connectivism.ca [Accessed: 01/09/2014]
- Siemens, G. (2006h). Challenges in obtaining learner, colleague and institutional support are likely but can be addressed through providing an understanding of the theoretical and practical foundations. [Online] Challenges in obtaining learner, colleague and institutional support are likely but can be addressed through providing an understanding of the theoretical and practical foundations. Available from: http://www.connectivism.ca [Accessed: 01/09/2014]

Ethical approval was not required for this project as only existing published research has been used.