**Generation @ & digital media education**

**Abstract**

In this paper, I survey some ideas of participating as teachers and learners in the contemporary digital media culture. I look at how the creative possibilities presented by electronic deliveries are evident to students in their everyday lives, but have yet to be fully utilised in the development of curricula and teaching. This paper addresses the question of how we might begin to understand the educational possibilities of the multi-media text in cyberspace. Our students are bombarded by information, yet are time poor. This is partly because they are engaged in tribal e-communications. I utilize a narrative methodology that I term ‘a subjective academic narrative’. The struggle with meaning that moved authority to the reader from the author is one that led to postmodernism and to current cultural, literary and textual theories being drawn together. (Buttigieg; Milner and North; Norris). It also led to the reader becoming involved in the production of meaning, of the text and of the discourse in particular ways. It is clear that the production of electronic texts in everyday lives enacts textuality and discourse in non-authoritative ways. This has immediate implications for teaching and learning in the emergent electronic culture. When such electronic spaces as Facebook, MySpace and Current allow viewers to create content, we as educators may well see the death of the author in a different and perhaps more troubling way.

**Keywords:** creativity; e-teaching and e-learning; e-games.

**Introduction: Computerised textuality and discourse**

Easy access to a computer means that anyone can be globally published. It also seems to mean that everyone is a writer/author/e-producer if they choose to become one. Roland Barthes (1977) confronted the authority of the writer. Barthes disrupted the accepted mode of authorship to famously declare that the author as god was dead and that no text of any kind could come to life without the active interpretations of individual readers coming from particular times, places and cultural environs. The disruption of authority in writing that arises from Postmodernism initially engaged me. Now I fear that it may contribute to illiteracy driven by the accessibility of the ‘e’.

The World Wide Web with which we are so familiar today only became generally available in the mid-1990’s. Initially the relevance of critical and cultural theories on textuality and discourse to the World Wide Web was very clear, as the web was almost entirely text based. There was very little real understanding, much less use, of the multimedia functions it offers. As the commercial programs have become more accessible and the technology improved, so the abilities and confidence of the users of electronic devices have developed. In this sense, the personal computer is no longer merely a sophisticated typewriter, and the electronic text has become the truly multi-media hypertext. Furthermore, reality has been enriched by hyper-reality and virtual reality, and the user has become what Roland Barthes called the ‘writerly-reader’ in a very particular way: the electronic writer is the producer/enactor of the text rather than the consumer of the text.

This raises some very particular questions about the teaching and learning process in relationship to our e-literate students including those related to authority/authorship such as:

- Does the death of the author also signal the death of the creative writer, the film-maker, the photographer and so on?
- Are the narratives that individuals produce from their own lives and experiences able to match those of the novelist, the theorist, the academic, the teacher, the thinker and the producer who is valued by a large artistic, academic and literary community?
- Does the global possibility of the blog and social networking sites, for example, somehow raise the trite and everyday unreflected upon experiences of the individual to the levels that engaged those who read literature, or make or appreciate art and music?
- Surely the idea of the ‘writerly-reader’ is quite debased in this e-context?

These are questions to be considered of the provision of a personal narrative within a new technology that’s often accused of participating in technological determinism. There is also the interesting question of the displacement of the professional: the author/ity. Whilst many of these have implications for fair use and copyright, this capitalist implication is not their greatest cost. Our e-literate students come to us from a technical and gaming background that
shows everything is possible in authorship, but that also displays that there is much online ‘authorship’ that is empty: about nothing considered, or from higher-order thinking processes. Furthermore, we as teachers are struggling to find our own place in the ‘e’ and also to be acknowledged by our literate students as even having such a place.

**life in cyberspace**

Perhaps TV prefigures multi-layered presences in that the most common mode of self-inscription today is involved in the use of the handheld electronic program selector that enables us to ‘surf’ the offerings on T.V. What occurs in real time when we do this is that we set our own program for watching television. We can move from station to station every second to enact in our living rooms the famous fractured discourse or ‘pastiche’ so beloved to postmodernists. Our young students are not reliant upon TV for this: they have lived their lives in the ‘e’. Remember that the WWW only became generally available in 1994, and social networking sites outside educational institutions in 2004. Our present cohort of students was born into constructing themselves through the ‘e’. Today’s young people think that electronic access is everywhere they choose to open their phones, Ipads or computers.

The ‘e’ certainly involves the production of self. It blurs the historical distinctions between fictional and real representations: ‘...the real itself and its ethnographic or sociological representations are...fictions, albeit powerful ones that we do not experience as fictions but as true.’ (Gordon 1997:11). Once we went to the creative arts, to philosophy and even psychology to try to understand our human condition. Today we gaze at ‘reality’ shows where individuals seek to be seen so as to affirm their existence. Significantly, generation® creates its own reality shows on blogs, Facebook and other social networking sites. Why is this? Ian Buchanan (2001) says that one reason is a kind of perverse feel-good: ‘...reality T.V.... however much it warms us and makes us feel good inside in actuality sheds no light.’ (pp1) At the same time, he argues that it’s not mere voyeurism that attracts us, but rather a ‘concretization’ of our fantasies of privation, boredom, and the thrill of feeling horrified about someone else. 'We turn on the TV not to watch people starve so much as to bask in the reflected warmth of their longing gaze-their unrequited but omnipresent desire for everything we have to hand that until we imagined we didn’t have it seemed utterly banal is what we enjoy the most.' (pp2)

Today, even when watching TV with the program selector in hand, our Western students understand as well as come from a different cultural text from any that has ever existed previously: that is the electronic text leading to virtual reality. It challenges us to a new understanding of what it is to be creative within the learning and teaching interaction.

A central part of learning, creativity itself is a significant element of human experience. It contributes to the health and the growth of the culture as well as that of the individual. In living our lives, each of us is called upon to be, both directly and indirectly, very creative. This is, paradoxically, an ‘everyday creativity’ that is not recognised by the community because it is the common experience. There are indeed many aspects of ‘everyday creativity’, but in the dominant Western culture the term of ‘creativity’ is most usually applied to individual endeavours of a high degree of originality in, for example, music, the visual arts, writing and dance. It is agreed that such creative activities are original, passionately driven, and intense in their nature. Creative people, in whatever field, stand above the common herd not only in the use of their talent but also in their ability to think and act beyond the known and accepted. They are innovative in that they are ready to seek out the new, to be original. How does our culture-particularly our educational culture- encourage this (if indeed it does)? 'Studies of careers of cohorts of creative people show that the most common form in which the choice of an appropriate vocation is facilitated through the influence of an admired person is exposure to a master teacher, usually in adolescence.’ (Gedo.1996. 17).

Does the ‘e’ permit even more creativity through the access to technology? Let’s think about such ‘reality’ T.V. shows as ‘Big Brother’ or the Australian ‘reality’ films ‘Jackass 1 +2 where the idea is to shock the public by showing people doing stupid things. Similarly, the American ‘Bumfights’ pays homeless people to fight one another for the delectation of viewers. Are these examples of the democratisation of authority in textuality and discourse?

The concept of such ‘reality’ as degrading, even threatening, to participants (and audiences) seems a very hollow idea of creativity. The local Foxtel magazine (2006:35) also runs a promo masquerading as an article on “Men behaving badly” which is the basis for a reality T.V. show called ‘Backpackers’. It’s compared with ‘...Jackass for its no holds barred depiction f loutish behaviour.’

**Mass Culture**

As I have averred, the hand that holds the zapper rules the television program selection. More than this, it produces highly individualized viewers who look at television in a particular way not envisaged by the programs printed for viewer selections. This has now been enhanced to allow such interactions with the screen as stop, rewind, store etc.
Although it prefigures the literate culture, television remains the most pervasive technological influence on young people today. In their teenage years, 94% of young people confirm that they ‘quite like’ watching television, 81% using the internet and 72% playing computer games’ (Woolcott 2002 p.18). Young people, then, live quite comfortably in an electronic culture that brings immediacy of meaning to the term ‘virtual reality’.

In 1944, in their identification and discussion of the culture industry, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer indicated how mass culture stamped out by the culture industry acts as a kind of manufacturer of sameness. They call this ‘…the rhythm of the iron system.’ (pp1) saying that it results in the dumbing-down of its recipients, whatever its claims to individuality or creativity of expression for/by the individual. This ubiquity of content and impact is not itself purposeless. It is manipulated by the people at the top who hold the greatest economic powers. In our educational endeavours, we struggle not to impose ‘the rhythm of the iron system’, particularly in relationship to teaching and learning in cyberspace.

The e has introduced the new components of ubiquity and interactivity as well as multi-media. Interesting, then, is the capacity of the mobile phone, owned by almost all of our present students, to draw communications technology together. The mobile phone acts as a portable computer, television, radio, camera or video-camera that can hold manipulable information, and show and/or store and select real time transmissions. What might this mean for learning and teaching in the 21st century?

Perhaps the most instructive e interaction is that of ‘look at me live on the computer’ clearly seen in blogging. Cultural ideologies that are distinctly Western dominate the text and discourse of blogging. Presentation, references, interpretations, and perceptions of both the blogger and the imagined and real reader are within the cultural domain and dominance of western ideologies as they form, inform and perform the self. This supports the contention that sociocultural signification systems are inherent within the self: even when we critique or analyse those very dominant influences, we are also subject to them. Perhaps we are most subject to them when we become authors of the self online. This self may well be shallow, banal, uninformed, working at the most basic level of thinking, without any formal or even informal education: yet it has replaced the reader of the authoritative as ‘the one’. The implications for us as teachers are quite profound. We need to understand that our students are not ourselves and that they don’t even share a past with us: they are significantly influenced by the electronic technology of the present that encourages them to see themselves as having knowledge and ability that they do not in fact possess.

The technology of the present

At first sight, individualisation on the www or through the ‘e’ is clearly a threat to commercialization and hence capitalism. The publishing, educational, music and creative arts industries are a huge component of infotainment sales, productions and services. Music-makers, for example, can become some of the richest and most famous people in the world. Moving outside commercial channels means that millions of dollars in reproduction rights are lost to creators, impresarios, entrepreneurs and industry members. This appears to act against the whole ideology of capitalism itself. Yet what has happened is that the industry has permitted this because it leads to greater influence on a wider market and hence to more commercial impact. In the same way, blogging is being utilized by new media owners, and the ipod is being seen as an end of purchase communications opportunity. Behind podcasting is the electronic construction of self that seems to be unrestricted by business systems, political licences and company policies. Furthermore, others want a more realistic sense of the podcaster than they receive from the more professional D.J. or broadcaster. Moreover, they can make money through connections to blogs that appeal to a global niche market that may be unsustainable in a local or even national one. Radio stations themselves are beginning to podcast by offering archived material. What does this mean for us as educators? One way we have identified is to provide audio files on our virtual lecture CDRoms that can be downloaded by students on to their ipod. This means that they can listen to their lectures in their own time and space.

The technology of computerisation involves interactions in the virtual reality of cyberspace and enables our 21st century students to feel that they are at the centre of the web of knowledge and developing creative abilities. Once they were peripheral: they were drawn in through the gatekeepers of knowledge. As teachers, we played a significant part in the construction of them as adults within the community. Today, as the Nike ad says, ‘just do it’. What engages us as teachers is not this assumption that anyone can ‘just do it’. Many students take a topic and google it. They cut and paste teacher responses online that cannot be detected as plagiarism. Their view of learning is to ‘just do it’…then it’s over and done with. We teachers know that the life of the intellect is demanding and that its satisfaction resides in the very fact that we must exercise our minds beyond the obvious and everyday: that we must think. This mis-match must be addressed when we consider the power of the electronic construction of self over the traditional modes of learning who we are and who we might become. The authoritative web of knowledge that higher order thinking demands is still most easily accessed through learning from and with teachers.
eStudents are under immense pressure to construct themselves as individuals in cyberspace. Virtual reality provides our students with multiple inputs that include chatrooms, mobile phones and T.V., radio, pod/blog/vlog etc casting. It is the traditional classroom that is on the periphery today. The question that we as teachers must ask of the ‘e’ is how do we understand it and utilize its strengths with our eliterate students to enable their literacy and creativity in other arenas? Blogs can be used as creative learning sites where students place their work for peer interactions and/or do clearly shared group work. Are they? Clearly the ‘e’ is able to be used to develop complex deep learning tools that are attractive to eliterate students.

Our students come to us without the assuredness of a definitive and established cultural construction: they know that everything can be digitally altered. For example, programs such as photoshop allow the creation of individualised reality photographs. These new programs enable the manipulation of images in ways that the still or filmic cameras have not permitted. Actual photographs can be manipulated, but virtual reality pictures can also appear as lifelike experiences that our own natural life tells us are too extraordinary to be real. These special effects that rely for their creation on algorithms rather than lived experiences appear to produce a new understanding of ourselves as humans.

Such synthetic photographs and visuals draw upon our cultural belief in the reality of the pictorial record. This is encompassed in the saying that ‘one picture is worth a thousand words’ that underpins traditional photography and cultural experiences such as the television news. Goran Sonesson calls this a ‘truth witness’ view of photography that validates our reception of synthesized hyper-real visual texts. He foresees a time, probably now with us, that “…the synthetic picture becomes as common as the photograph; then we will be forced to abandon this more and more improbable presupposition of the existence of a previous relation of proximity between the motive and the picture.’ (1998(b): 2) That time has come. It can be clearly seen in its predominance in electronic games. The appearance of reality enacted through the interactivity involved in computer games and the manipulation of images is becoming a significant experience of not only dedicated gamesters. The manipulation of images is the basis of electronic games playing. This experience of virtual reality is compelling. In games, the player experiences a reality that is only accessible through electronic media. Such hyper-reality is also experienced as a three dimensional pictorial yet real interactivity. Games, then, offer us a significant model for developing curricula.

Social Networking Sites

Perhaps the most ubiquitous means of communication in the second decade of the 21st century, sites such as Facebook provide the means for personal autobiographies that reach multiple recipients with phenomenal ease. Whilst many studies critique and devalue this, Nicole Ellison et al look at the positive aspects of such social networking sites (SNS) They argue that such sites increase social capital by adding strong networks to relationships, such relationships are in themselves a major resource. Moreover, this leads to psychological well-being and increased self-esteem. Hence their studies show that the 94% of college students who use SNS benefit as ‘Facebook appears to play an important role in the process by which students form and maintain social capital (2007:1161) Also, ‘SNSs help maintain relations as people move from one offline community to another’ (1164) Since 2006 when Facebook opened up its site to people who were not students with an official campus email account, there has been an exponential increase in users. Bismal Viswanath et al noe that ‘popular social networks have hundreds of millions 9of registered users and are growing at a rapid pace…and the average number of friends on Facebook is over 120’. (2009:1)

One of the major concerns about SNSs is loss of privacy. Alessandro Acquisti and Ralph Gross argue that despite weak privacy controls on SNSs people still willingly divulge personal information. “nobody is literally forced to join online social network, and most networks we know encourage, but do not force users to reveal…yet one cannot help but marvel at the nature, amount, and detail of personal information some users provide and ponder how informed this information sharing is” (2) The new generation of online users, it seems, is very trusting towards SNSs, using them regularly to interact with others and to reveal day-to-day aspects of their own lives. They see these interactions as having a benefit for their social and personal selves. This is despite the fact that ‘social networking sites record all interactions and retain them for potential use in social data mining ’ (Dwyer et al 2007:3) It is also despite the fact that SNSs are available to literally millions of people and, as Catherine Dwyer et al ask: ‘is it possible to join a network of millions of people and be able to trust all of them?’ The resounding answer might clearly be ‘no’; but this answer is far from clear. In his study of the motivations of people using SNSs, Adam Joinson identifies three major uses of them: ‘to maintain and re-create connections with friends, its use as a surveillance tool and for content delivery’ (2008: 5) This involves users gaining ‘traditional content gratification alongside building social capital, communication surveillance and social networking surfing’. Keeping an eye on the movements of one’s ‘friends’ doesn’t always seem too ‘friendly’, but SNSs also allow self-presentation that can be regularly edited and altered.
Joseph Walther et al (2008) see SNSs as being a space in which autobiographies are manufactured and altered in various iterations that may be authentic or manufactured both by the poster and by ‘friends’ who post their own comments that may be at odds with the authorized autobiography. There has been considerable public debate about what’s put on Facebook, and some extreme cases of bullying, sexual and other harassment (etc) have been reported. Nevertheless, most people do not remove derogatory comments made by so-called ‘friends’: ‘…even if people question what is being said about them, they may follow Facebook norms and leave questionable posts on display.’ (Walther et al 2008:30) This is important as many people, including potential employers, now use Facebook as an introduction to new people. Rather than self-disclosure, impressions are now available about SNS users that are not manufactured by themselves. Of great interest was their finding that descriptions of social behaviours that were questionable, such as excessive drinking of alcohol or random sex, resulting in a ‘double standard response’ by friends’ postings where male behaviors were accepted and female behaviors were not: ‘not only do these findings suggest a double standard, they also reinforce concern over the potential of Facebook dynamics to reinforce stereotypes and behaviors that are potentially harmful…; Walthers et al 2008:45) It appears that SNSs are another site for socialization rather than a place for laterality.

Walther et al find that SNSs, then, are a potent force in the lives of their users. More than the posts made by the owner, those made by their ‘friends’ are an important influence on the perception that readers/users have of the owner. They also lead us to the important central question of such e-discourse and e-disclosure: ‘…who ‘owns’ the comments that appear on one’s Facebook wall: owners, friend or both?’. They consider that ‘as Web sites become more interactive and participatory, the question of textual authority becomes less clear.’ (@008:46) This, of course, can be seen to align with Roland Barthes assertion that in any text ‘the author as god is dead and the reader brings the text to life’ (1997) Moreover, it is of concern when we look at any narratives about our own lives, whatever the genre. If, as Gregory Ulmer states, the fictional aspects of the text are embedded in even academic works that are ‘mysteries’, who owns those stories.

Ulmer (1989) identifies a ‘mystorical’ approach to thinking and research. A ‘mystery’ puts under erasure all claims to fact/authenticity in writing. It shows all writing to be both personal and mysterious (my story and mystery) whatever its claims to authenticity and depersonalisation. It reveals the academic text to be sewn together as a compilation of the scholarly, the anecdotal or popular, and the autobiographical. It questions the dominant analytico-referential model of knowledge. At the same time it accords with much late 20th and early 21st century thinking about the self, the culture and even the world as a text to be constructed and read.

Gregory Ulmer’s mystical approach opens up the text to many possible readings: there is no ‘one way’. Thus even the act of writing, much less the lived experience of being, displays itself as non-authoritative in the conventional sense. The implications of this are manifold. For me, perhaps the most important-and the most galvanising-is that the academic life and academic writing and language are now able to be seen as open, explorative and aware of their own evanescent nature in the same way as any other form of written or lived discourse. That is, academic writing can be understood as related to and made up of multiple ways of respecting various personal experiences.

Thus, even academic and autobiographical works may need an ethics clearance if they are a part of a university subject or academic writing. Indeed, the Ethics Agreement states that all observed comments are subject to a general ethics clearance even when they are made as a part of one’s own story whether academic or general in nature, application, tone and genre.

Cliffe Lampe et al speak of the ‘interaction landscape’ of cyberspace (2008:721). They found that most users were ‘reifying existing offline networks rather than forging new relationships online.’ Thus, most were peer to peer interactions, although media publicity had made them more aware of the ubiquitous nature of viewers and the challenges Facebook entries made to privacy. (2008:722) However, this did not alter users’ positive attitudes to Facebook. This positivity is shown in the way Facebook users are not involved in role plays but ‘…predominately claim their identities implicitly rather than explicitly’ (Zhao et al 2008:1816) Identity construction, then, is a major autobiographic feature of online entries and interactions of which (in relationship to dating), Shanyang Zhao et al say: ‘…we expect people on Facebook to present their hoped-for possible selves rather than their “true” or hidden selves. Zhao et al say of this that more generally entries are socially constructed and contextualized. (2008:1831) Moreover, they remind us that the online world is an aspect of the offline world, not unrelated to it. Their resulting caveat is that ‘an important skill people need to learn is how to coordinate their behavior in these two realms’.

How do we as educators leverage this popularity and everyday use of SNSs? Clare Madge et al state that research into this is a ‘…sparse, if growing, field’. (2009:3) Their paper title suggest that it is largely viewed as informal friendship networks than spaces for education. Whilst students in their study from a 1st year undergraduate course did make some suggestions as to how SNSs could be utilised for curriculum, the main thrust was not for pedagogical reasons but
‘more to do with administrative arrangements’ or contacting staff for one on one learning. However, the authors note that the administrative functions were already available, and that ‘the time implications for staff may well preclude this idea being workable in practice’ (15). They therefore recommend using SNSs ‘backstage’. (18) However, they also note that further research may well open up further and different opportunities, noting that there are more ‘compelling questions’ than answers, and that there is a need for ‘serious research attention in the immediate future to gain a more nuanced and broader spectrum of understanding on social networking sites and their role in higher education.’ (19)

Not only are SNSs already here, but there is a correlative demand for higher education places that cannot be met by creating traditional universities. (Brown & Adler 2008:2) The probable advantages of a meeting point are still under construction. John Brown an Richard Adler see such a confluence as being available now: ‘Web 2.0 is creating a new kind of participatory medium that is ideal for supporting multiple modes of learning’ (2008:3) They consider the possibilities of developing a social learning model that “… is based on the premise that our understanding of content is socially constructed through conversations about that content and through grounded interactions, especially with other, around problems or actions. The focus is not so much on what we are learning but on how we are learning.’ (2008:3) They base this on evidence from a study by Richard Light that ‘one of the strongest determinants of students’

Multi-media and Virtual reality

In other anonymous online environments, play-acting enables students to reinvent themselves creatively like actors on stage following their personal script. Shanyang Zhao et al state that in anonymous online environments: ‘Individuals tend to play-act at being someone else or act out their underlying negative impulses in the online world.’ (2008:1817) This is so because ‘the advent of the internet has changed the traditional conditions for identity production. As the corporeal body is detached from social encounters in the online environment, it becomes possible for individuals to interact with one another on the Internet in fully disembodied text mode that reveals nothing about their physical characteristics…the combination of disembodiment and anonymity creates a technologically mediated environment in which a new mode of identity emerges.’ (2008:1817)

Such online role playing constructs a virtual reality that can enable people: Online role playing…can be an empowering process. Research has shown that removal of physical “gating features”(stigmatized appearance, stuttering, shyness etc) enables disadvantaged people…the emergent online anonymous environment also provides an outlet for the expression of one’s “hidden selves” and the exploration of non-conventional identities’ (Zhao et al 2008:1818).

In many ways, then, the once internal contradiction in the term ‘virtual reality’ is drawn together in electronic games playing: it is the object of the game to move the self as performative character, or the real self in virtual reality, from the beginning through many obstacles and choices to the successful conclusion or to one of many possible ‘endings’. In three dimensional interactivity, the players see objects from many angles, move in and out of range to close ups or broad views, perform actions and interactions both with the characters or envisualisations and with the performative gaming itself, make choices and introduce new elements, and generally act to produce a synthetic picture within a virtual reality that is becoming less and less identifiable as not real. Sonesson has his own warning about this: ‘The time has come in which we may all, Like Wu-tao-tze, paint a picture on the prison wall and enter it. But it remains to be seen whether another prison is awaiting us on the other side of the landscape.’ (p6)

Certainly games appear to reassure the player that they have skills in virtual reality that are non-existent in their own capacities. For example, in one game the player has to make the protagonist (who is and is not the player) make six notes on a flute to proceed to the next level. Even if the players cannot play the flute, this virtual interaction persuades them that they can. Yet when they leave the game, this capacity is left behind. They cannot really do what they seem to do.

The challenge to me as a teacher is to understand how such games-playing skills might become part of curriculum delivery. The interactivity of multimedia can be seen as a way in which students can enter into knowledge in new and galvanizing ways. Whilst a learning game can enable students to move from level to level once they have mastered certain skills or understood certain activities, it can also do much more than that. It can facilitate students who learn kinaesthetically, by sound as well as vision, and by interactivity as well as knowledge accrual in the traditional sense of memory. Above all, it can be aesthetically arranged, its architecture can be creative, its visuals can be thought of as artistic in traditional evaluations such as colour, form, inter-relationships and appeal as well as in e aesthetics.
The technology is becoming more enabling and accessible all of the time. In filming, for example, multi-media functions enable creativity through low-cost easy-to-use e equipment: ‘...affordable digital technology, seeping into the consumer market, is transforming the way film-makers work. And it is also helping unknown film-makers reach mainstream audiences...’ (Preiss, 2006:8) Of course, ‘...gear alone cannot improve poor film-making skills.’ Digital cameras, camcorders, and software programs mean easy editing, animation, and special effects. Continuity errors can be easily fixed. Yet huge questions remain to be settled about the role of education in such amateur authorship as well as the role of curriculum building by teacher who use film. These include production values, ethics, aesthetics, and planning as well as delivery. Taking up the technology without such teaching and learning risks the e-diminishing of willing and unwilling participants and even global bullying.

Teaching and learning in a global world

Teaching and learning in a global world: does it mean that we must re-evaluate what it is to BE by understanding the opportunities and flaws in the electronic construction of self? The claim for our present and more particularly forthcoming students is that they belong in a global technological culture. I have looked at some ways in which this might make us think anew about how they consider themselves. Is it possible that, paradoxically, they are coming from a global culture that also enhances the individual through the very components I have earlier considered? This global culture is personal and immediate at the same time as it is driven by technology and available online globally. It is often described as the culture of ‘a global village’.

Such a global culture must affect the ways in which we traditionally see and understand knowledge. Our students are coming from an electronic culture that is essentially non-linear. Knowledge can now be understood as rhizomatic rather than arboREAL. This theoretical concept of the rhizomatic text (Deleuze, G and Guattari, F. 1981) alters our Western mindset of ‘the tree of knowledge’. Instead of arboREAL interconnectedness, it proposes that knowledge may be more diverse in itself and may be propagated in different ways. The rhizomatic metaphor brings to our consciousness as one example the way that grass develops into a lawn. This provides a model for the consideration that electronic deliveries provide a space that is not restricted by the linear and authoritative nature of the printed book. The influence of print to the urge for analytic-referential ‘proof’ is thus disturbed.

Whereas culture has previously been seen as the particularization of local habits, the new technologies are bringing a global individualization through many of these techniques I have discussed. Such compressions of a-synchronous time and space overcome all previous boundaries to communication.

(Kellner http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/dk/GLOBPM.htm)

Like reality T.V. like holding the TV zapper, like having the mobile phone always to hand as a communication tool, do our present and future students only feel real and alive when they are somehow in an experience that is mediated by the new technologies? In 1985, Joachim Raschke said ‘A movement that does not make it into the media is non-existent’ (de Donk 2004: 29). In 2005, the word ‘individual’ might replace the word ‘movement’ so that today ‘an individual who doesn’t make it into the media is non-existent.’

There seems no future for learning and teaching if we demonise technology as having broken apart human enculturation upon the torture wheel of electronic virtual reality. Much that’s written about virtual reality is indeed technophobic and involves the critical position of techno-determinism. This places the individual within the power of the technology...but what if we turn that around and see the individual as empowered by the technology to inform, entertain, play, reflect upon self, and even to enter into a global realisation and publication of self? Our students sit in cafes in Geelong or Minnesota and enter chatrooms around the world. They are in a car and communicating with friends on the phones with texts, still photographs and videos of themselves in the moment. They are on computers and having visual realtime conversations with their cousins in Scotland from their bedrooms in North Fitzroy. They are playing games where they are the characters in the games and their actions are shown on the screen. They are keeping a daily visual and verbal diary of their lives through their blogs or vlogs. Getting on to a computer means that anyone can be globally published. It also seems to mean that everyone is a writer if they choose to become one: how might we think about this?

eTeaching and eLearning

Operating as best they may within what the contemporary philosopher Slavjo Zizek’s identifies as contemporary cultural insanity, Western students, and even Universities themselves, are looking for flexible deliveries of courses. The practical ideas behind this from the student perspective are driven by the need for students to earn money. Many students today work over 20 hours a week, some to maintain a lifestyle and others simply to survive. Universities look to flexible deliveries partly because they see that the student profile has changed and students need to be able to do
their courses at any place and time, and partly for commercial reasons to do with internationalisation and the provision of buildings and learning resources.

Since 1997, Swinburne has had an undergraduate model we built for Media, of learning and teaching online with a stable CDRom and dynamic peripheral of the WWW site. This has grown into an online Master of Arts (Writing). One of the most interesting pedagogical challenges we have been involved in has been the development of a new form of educational delivery that recognises the practical needs of students as well as their growing eliteracy. In our undergraduate teaching, we developed a series of virtual lectures and tutorials. The lectures are on a stable CDRom that is based on a game-visit to a museum. Carefully selected sites on the WWW provide a weekly tutorial space with questions and links to relevant websites. This acts as the dynamic peripheral; they are easy to revisit and change.

This undergraduate Media model of learning and teaching online with a stable CDRom and dynamic peripheral of the WWW site has grown into an online Master of Arts (Writing) One of the most interesting pedagogical challenges we have been involved in has been the development of a new form of educational delivery that recognised the time-poor practical student needs as well as their growing eliteracy.

We realised that the ‘e’ had changed our student base forever and that it also offered us learning and teaching models that were quite new. The 15 postgraduate writing subjects delivering the University the Masters of Arts (Writing) consist of CDRoms with Virtual Lecture interactions and 3-5,000 downloadable Word Lectures, WWW sites with relevant links and Blackboard Discussion Threads as Virtual Tutorials; space for students to share their work for critical friendship and also a chatroom to act as a Virtual Coffee Shop. These are all a-synchronous. Many students are international, one of our students toured Australia and stopped at libraries to log in; others attend their virtual tutorials in the wee small hours.

This learning and teaching approach is based upon the development of a positive learning environment through understanding where the students begin and relating this to where the learning journey offers to take them. It also involves professional engagement with ensuring that the course content is current and appropriate and is aesthetic and engaging within its multi-media capacities. Above all, engagement with eteaching and elearning comes from a belief sustained through many years of teaching that learning is a potentially redemptive, transformative and intellectually galvanizing opportunity. This is so for us as well as our students. The ‘e’ has provided new curriculum developments for us to undertake. In the 21st century, students engage in learning through virtual reality in cyberspace: and so do teachers.

Conclusion

Today the author is the user. One result of this may be that the authority figure of the teacher is now subject to the realization by the student that the technology produces for them an entirely new way of learning. They are already expert in the instant knowledge download of the vast WWW network that provides ubiquitous learning. They have come to believe that they somehow know stuff because they can connect to the internet and get instant information on their topic. Teachers know that gaining information may be easy, that gaining knowledge is much more challenging and that making that information and gaining knowledge in some form of wisdom is extremely challenging indeed. Higher order thinking is not readily available because the technology is there to deliver materials. At the same time, it is essential that teachers understand the opportunities offered by e-learning. Creativity, too, is not merely a matter of aiming the camera at whatever you’re doing. Where education aims to develop and sustain deep learning and creativity, it must give some serious thought to how the ‘e’ can facilitate rather than debase it. As our students become increasingly engaged with communications technologies in their everyday lives, they want to utilize them in their learning. Indeed, people born since the 1990’s may be called Generation@. It’s time for educationalists in the 21st century to re-invent ourselves as Teachers®.

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