

Interactive Essays; using multimedia and digital networks in summative assignments

A current student and staff HEFCE Catalyst funded research project 'interactive essay assignment model' promotes technology as a communicative tool that bridges the academic and professional environment, raising skill levels and preparing students for work. The interactive essay (an assessment outcome for level 5 education studies students) seeks to improve student learning outcomes by embedding industry networks and critical evaluation in academic study. Students are required to engage in reflective practice by creating peer and professional networks to encourage critique and feedback, improve their learning outcomes through self-reflection and use of technology and to foster student-employer relationships, encouraging interaction and communication to incorporate industry relevant topics and practices. The project emerged from wanting to establish new ways of developing essays that adhere to the existent, traditional, formal requirements while also embedding the possibilities technology provides. The introduction of animation, video or multiple ways of sharing knowledge also develops new skills. Students are encouraged go beyond just adding hyper-links, or simply embedding videos for no apparent purpose, and urged to think of ways to engage the reader and enable them to interact. For example, the comments box on a blog is an accessible and useful means of getting feedback from readers. This feedback space seeking opinion increases awareness of other perspectives. The essay becomes more than just a final artefact, a single product that is laboured over, submitted and forgotten. It takes a life of its own. The presentation explains the project in more detail and led by the recruited interns who will discuss their research, work with the level 5 students, and their findings so far. As students as researchers they have reviewed literature, created resources, presented and interviewed students. The project will be trialled across discipline areas at the college next academic year.

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