

## **Incorporating Internet Resources into College English Teaching**

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*Abstract: This article is focus on my attempts of two projects to incorporate use of Internet resources into my teaching practice; a familiar form of ICT, open to use across the curriculum, and raiding pedagogical issues which resemble those arising with many other classroom uses of Internet resources increasing, have also reported considerable professional uncertainty about how to incorporate them productively into mainstream practice.*

*Keywords: incorporating, exploitation of Internet Resources, virtual archive, (Re)orientation*

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### **1. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Research has shown that student engagement is linked to positive learning outcomes (Diemer et al., 2012) and “is positively related to both grades and persistence” (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006). While there have been many definitions of student engagement, there is no consensus among scholars as to what exactly counts as such. In this study, student engagement refers to “the extent to which students take part in educationally effective practices,” (Kuh, as cited in Axelson and Flick, 2011,p.40) in the classroom. Student engagement is multilayered and includes different categories that are equally salient. Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) include the following categories within the concept: behavioral, cognitive and emotional. Behavioral engagement includes involvement in activities related to academic success and take place when students are physically involved in effective learning practices and activities. Emotional engagement is thought to occur when students have a positive attitude and enjoy that they are doing; while cognitive engagement is thought to take place when students invest into learning in a focused, self-regulating and strategic way (Fredricks et al., 2004). It is important to note that all these layers are equally important and are all present when students are actively engaged in educational activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). Active learning is closely connected to student engagement; it takes place, as Prince (2004) explains, when students are doing meaningful activities in the classroom while thinking about they are doing, hence “the core elements of active learning are student activity and engagement in the learning process” (p.223)

## **2. PROJECT 1: USING INTERNET RESOURCES TO RESEARCH AN ENGLISH COURSEWORK TOPIC000**

This project aimed “to devise strategies to enable college students to develop as efficient and discerning electronic information gatherers rather than remain as serendipitous and credulous surfer-browsers”. In the opening lessons I set my students a very concrete objective, aimed at keeping them on task: finding five facts relevant to their chosen writing topic. However, my own interventions aimed to take students beyond amassing facts, towards a more argumentative use of material, through formulating an appropriate organizing question: “They need a question in their head, and then they can marshal their facts and produce an argument.”

I sought to establish a dialectic between library and Internet resources, exploiting their complementary qualities: “Library stock has gone through a filtering process, and therefore it’s appropriate information for their needs at this stage. It’s very useful to have that as opposed to the freedom of the Internet, which is going to get them much more excited, and give much more up-to-date information, but it isn’t always reliable.” However, I noted that the viability of browsing the book stock in a university library reduced incentives for students to employ more sophisticated search techniques, and similarly that a simple Internet search typically provided sufficient material for browsing. Following work which sought to motivate and develop my students’ use of search techniques, the result is that “these thinking skill strategies sharpened the students’ understanding of their chose topic”. Nevertheless, I also noticed that “although students were compliant in the lessons, they seemed to regard the Internet as their own private area of expertise and power and resented teacher intrusion”.

## **3. PROJECT 2: USING A VIRTUAL ARCHIVE IN DEVELOPING SKILLS OF HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION**

This project assembled resources into a virtual archive relating the First World War, using them to bring out the part played by interpretation of diverse source material in historical enquiry. I highlighted how Internet material helped to enlarge evidence and experience through provision of authentic resources and use of non-textual media. The project had gathered differing representations and interpretations of battle and war: “we’ve got on there pictures, written accounts of the battle, we’ve got biographical information, we’ve got letters, we’ve got diaries, and we’ve got diaries, and we’ve got posters. We’ve got all sorts.” Alongside a battlefield visit, these were seen as “alerting the different senses to what it was all about”, providing “a more total picture”, and bringing “the reality of outside into classroom.”

A central concern for me was to structure and support activity while preserving student agency, and how students were able to dictate to some extent the pace; how a lot of time they were free to discuss, at whichever level, and their freedom about how to present. However, I also noted my own contribution in going around and feeding ideas and asking questions, singling out the contribution made by discussion of on-screen work: “it was easier to intervene as there was already ongoing dialogue between students. Having work on the screen enabled

both students and me to view and discuss the work collaboratively.” Actually, further ways in which ICT enhanced discussion and argumentation, so contributing to successful learning that creating tables helped students to classify their ideas and allowed them to manipulate what they had found out more easily.” Students had been able to support their findings in a more sophisticated way, by the ease of incorporating evidence into their work.

#### (Re) orientation of learning and teaching

All the projects organised lessons around teacher-supported, ICT-based, student activity, presented by teachers as a deliberate choice of an “independent” or “student-centred” approach. This was seen as promoting more active student participation in lessons, and greater engagement in thinking; and, correspondingly, as permitting teachers to stand back and take more of an advisory role. Teachers reported supporting and shaping student activity through various forms of informal teaching: helping students with technical skills and troubleshooting technical difficulties; showing an interest in what students were doing and giving them rewards such as praise; making sure that students were on task, and jollying or chivvying them along. Teachers talked of supporting students who were struggling, pointing students in the right direction, trying to move them on. They described themselves as probing and stimulating students, as focusing them onto specific points, as feeding them ideas. They reported checking students’ understanding, helping students to understand, discussing students’ ideas.

Teachers also emphasized building and capitalizing on students’ sense of capability and agency. They noted how working with ICT gave students opportunities to express and take pleasure in their capability. Equally, teachers were aware that some students needed encouragement, support, and often a degree of flexibility if they were to make confident and personally satisfying use of ICT. Many teachers emphasized opportunities for students to exercise a degree of control over their work and responsibility for it. This tended to be expressed in terms of letting students do things for themselves, in terms of giving them choice—of which resources to work with, and which ICT tools to use — and of giving them responsibility for pacing their own work.

If a forthcoming paper (Hennessy et al., 2005), I suggest that socio-cultural learning theory provides a promising framework for analyzing the ways in which teachers (and students) were coming to structure classroom activities and interactions. Interaction between pairs of students, and with the teacher, capitalized on the visibility of work on the computer screen. As the teacher circulated, students exploited informal opportunities to solicit help and feedback, while teachers assessed progress and understanding and adjusted their support contingently. Proactive interventions, responsive assistance and opportunistic interactions created more reciprocity of student and teacher agency in structuring activity. The technology is clearly far more than an inert contextual feature; it is a mediational means which plays an integral role in shaping activity, bestowing shared “mediated agency” upon the participants.

#### Exploitation of Internet Resources and ICT Tools

Teachers reported that Internet material enhanced lesson resources primarily through providing material lacking in textbooks and offering wider coverage than the books available

in school libraries. They also emphasized the way in which authentic resources created a sense of contact between the school classroom and a wider world, helping to stimulate student interest and engagement in lessons. Nevertheless, all the projects also reported that a great deal of Internet material was ill-matched to students' capabilities or to educational purposes. Consequently, teachers were concerned with structuring and supporting student access to Internet resources. Many projects had been over-optimistic in expecting student searching of the Internet to provide ready access to suitable information. Accordingly, use was made of online worksheets or intranet portals incorporating hyperlinks, not just to guide students to preselected sites, but to help students to access them more quickly and reliably. Some projects did maintain a deliberate investment in helping students to develop more effective strategies for seeking and sifting information. Several projects — notably the two sketched earlier — gave explicit attention to how using ICT tools to search for resources, to search within them, and to manipulate their content, could support subject learning. At the same time, student resistance was reported to overly structured approaches, perceived as diminishing personal agency.

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