

Digital Course Construction: Learn to Produce - Produce to Learn

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Abstract: Educational developers find themselves in an unstable balance between the inertia of tradition and an increased demand for innovative approaches. They must choose between tools, themes and traditions that address the local context and an emerging global convergence of such considerations. This paper presents a model with which to design digitally supported and both locally and internationally oriented courses based on practical experiences with WEB 2.0-oriented teaching and learning since 2005.

Introduction

Traditional education takes place in a closed physical and social space and with limited and well known technical resources [Tyack and Tobias 1994]. More often than not there is only one person in charge.

Digital technology is now transforming these ways in which we learn and teach. We might describe the new developments from sociological, technological, institutional and economic perspectives. But perhaps we can pinpoint the current development by reference to a change in reading and writing modes. As measured on an ordinary day in 2000 and 2009 the average number of minutes spent on reading has markedly increased in Norway (Figure 1).

But this reflects two opposing tendencies. While paper-based reading is somewhat reduced, which partly explains the financial difficulties of the printed press in this country and elsewhere, there is a marked increase in the time spent on screen reading.

We take this change in the reading mode as a surface phenomenon that covers deeper structural changes in our mediated communication patterns. The printed medium tends to support a communicative structure. A few authors and editors produce texts for the consumption of manifold readers. This is the one-to-many mode of traditional publishing. This also defined the social function and framework for linear intermedial site histories and bookshops. The digital space, on the other hand, is essentially, - and therefore also socially -, structured for both reading and writing. The inherently dialogical character of the digital medium is closely associated by the educational communities and integrated into educational designs.

But during the first phase of networked digitalisation the dialogic and reciprocal character of the World Wide Web was somewhat masked by the fact that it was actually easier to consume than to produce content. But now, - with the very rapid advance of Web 2.0 techniques and infrastructure -, content production has been radically simplified. Writing and other forms of self-expression is on a par with reading and watching in terms of technical challenges. The new Read & Write space extends to virtually every screen surface that is digitally interconnected. For these reasons we assume that one defining parameter of current educational life is that the social conditions of schooling, and with that the teacher status of my classroom as my aside, is under stress.

But there is of course more to social interaction than reading and writing on a digital screen. Physical proximity and a continuing physical space is required for important transactions like group synchronization, development of trust, internalisation of governance and power structures etc. Early predictions of the status of birds-

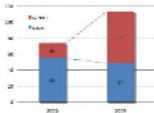


Figure 1 Minutes of daily reading from screen and paper, Norway 2000 and 2009 (Statistics Norway 2009)

