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An investigation into blogging as an opportunity for work-integrated learning for journalism students.

Abstract

Blogging has become a well-established method of online communication and publication, used by individuals and organisations to disseminate news, ideas and information. In their earlier forms, blogs were used as online diaries, but have now evolved into complex digital environments. This paper argues that these online environments with their associated communities, offer journalism students opportunities for work-integrated learning. It argues that blog environments have the potential to enable students to develop journalism-specific skills, and enhance transferable graduate attributes including creativity, sophisticated communication competencies, initiative and problem solving. It suggests that blogging offers a platform for accessing experiential learning, and as such should be considered within a curriculum for work-integrated learning in the journalism and media subject area.

Introduction

The development of generic, transferable skills through work-integrated learning* in higher education settings has been well documented and studies have demonstrated their value to graduates and employers. (Smith and Wilson, 1992; Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick & Cragolini 2004; Wilton, 2012)

Opportunities for work-integrated learning have been well described and understood, with students usually encouraged to undertake some form of supervised placement, where they work with an established employer for a set period of time. This could be through a day release programme, a sandwich year or a short-term block placement for example. The expectation is that through placement activity, the student engages in situated experiential learning relevant to their discipline. (Moon, 2004; Beard and Wilson, 2006) A recent large scale study by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council which looked at integrating practice-based experiences into teaching and learning, acknowledged that while supervised placements tend to be the norm, other modes of experiential learning are equally as valid in undergraduate programmes. (Billett 2011a) Billett frames the opportunities for work-integrated learning to embrace wider forms of experiential learning including observation of practice, simulated activity, and prior employment. He argues that the teaching of work-integrated learning needs to factor in these wider practice-based experiences.

This paper considers whether Billett's "opportunities" for practice-based experiences could be further extended in the teaching of journalism, and explores the possibility of using the online environment and its associated communities as a tool for facilitating work-integrated experiential learning through blogging. It also considers the nature of the learning experiences that blogging offers, and raises some of the associated curriculum considerations.

Three key questions then are considered:

* In the UK, terminology such as sandwich-year, placement and work-based learning is well established; however, increasingly "work-integrated learning" is being used to reflect the wider mechanisms and modes now being used to give students experience of work environments.

- Does blogging offer a valid environment and tool to facilitate work-integrated learning?
- What is the nature of the learning through blogging?
- What are the curriculum considerations if we are to consider building blogging into a work-integrated learning programme?

Context

Blogging is a contested concept, under constant revision as new online platforms and technologies emerge. Early forms of blogging consisted of text based personal diary entries, which were widely disparaged by journalists and mainstream news organisations, and viewed largely as inconsequential commentaries on trivialities. However, blogging has changed in tandem with the development of increasingly sophisticated technology, which has provided platforms for valid authoritative voices to be heard, and space for freelance writers to reach wider audiences. (Rettberg 2014; Shoemaker and Reese, 2014)

Mainstream news organisations have also exploited the potential of the blog to communicate with their audiences, and blogging skills are no longer seen as being the sole province of the lone freelance writer. The majority of media organisations employ journalists to manage their blog output. As Bradshaw and Rohumaa observe:

“Blogging has undergone a tremendous transformation over the past few years. From publishing pariah to saviour of journalism, it is now a rare news organisation that does not use blogs. Where once editors asked ‘Is blogging journalism?’ they now ask ‘How can we make the most of our blogs?’” (2011 pp74)

According to Jones and Salter (2012) blogging now has a well-established place in media industries, with many writers making a career in this field.

For the purpose of this study blogging is discussed as the practise of creating a personal website or web page where an individual records opinion and writes and uploads news stories, features, comment and pictures, with links to other sites, on a regular basis. The context of the study is media and journalism education where students are actively encouraged to investigate stories, interview, construct journalistic copy and upload their work as blogs. It is not the purpose of this study to consider the journalistic content of blogs in any detail as this is a large area of study in its own right, but to look at wider aspects of learning through the practice of blogging. It considers whether blogging offers opportunities for experiential learning, and also the nature of that learning.

The ease of creating blogs through sites such as wordpress.com, blogger.com and blogspot.com means that anyone with access to technology can write and upload a blog, and many journalism programmes across the UK higher education sector encourage student blogging to the extent that lecturers host exemplar blogs which are used in their teaching of journalism skills. The expectation is that students are learning to hone their writing and the management of blogs through this practice. (Linford 2013)

Historically, one of the challenges facing journalism students was in demonstrating to prospective employers their ability to research and write viable stories that people would want to read. Journalism students would send work to newspapers and magazines in the hope that their stories would be used in printed format, helping the student build a "cuttings

file" of published work which they would then use at job interviews to persuade media organisations to employ them. Without a cuttings file, their employability is much reduced. However, getting work published as a journalism student is difficult. Unsolicited journalism submissions are selected at the vagaries of the news editor who has to balance that day's news agenda with available space on a page, often finding that there is no room for copy from unknown and unproved writers.

The development of online technologies, and arrival of the online platforms have offered opportunities for students to showcase their work by publishing it themselves, providing them with an online cuttings file for perusal by potential employers along with valuable data which would typically include the number of people who have read any particular blog, and comments the stories may have attracted from readers. Journalism students who blog can signpost a potential employer towards their work, demonstrating not only their capacity as writers, but the level of reader interest in their work through the number of "followers" (people who regularly access the writer's work) the blog might have and the comments posted by readers.

However, blogging is in essence self-directed work and while it is encouraged by journalism educators to enhance the development of journalism writing skills, it does not normally form part of journalism work-integrated learning programmes. The norm in journalism education is to encourage students to engage in work based placement activity within established media industries (Niblock, 2013). There has been very little research into the potential of blogging as a tool for experiential learning in a work-integrated learning context.

Beard and Wilson (2006) and Billett (2011a) make the point that the environment in which students engage can shape their learning, and that academic and practice-based settings offer different kinds of learning. Billett (pp10) discusses these settings in terms of physical and social elements in an attempt to embrace wider definitions of experiential learning, and adds: *"...elements of all three forms of the knowledge required for work performance: conceptual, procedural and dispositional, will develop from experiences in each setting."* When considering this point it is necessary to keep in mind the emerging complex environment created by journalistic blogs, as described for example by Bradshaw and Rohumaa (2011) or Rettberg (2014), where there is an ongoing dialogue with a live global audience, links to a number of electronic networks, and information-rich data generated by blog platforms about the audience. It could be argued that the physical and social spaces provided in the online environment do offer valid settings where journalism students can engage in focussed work-related experiential learning and gain Billett's conceptual, procedural and dispositional knowledge.

Methodology

This study uses purposive qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, a useful tool to gain an understanding of process, in this case applied to blogging (Glenn, 2010). Six interviewees were selected from a population of 100 journalism undergraduates, the selection criteria being that they had to have been actively writing a blog for more than 12 months. They were also selected because they wrote about different genre, to minimise the impact of the subject area they were writing about on the responses gathered. It is important to assess the validity of the respondents and their responses to questions (Glenn, 2010) and

this was done by looking at their blog posts when considering their responses to ensure that their claims were fairly reflected their online activity.

At the time of this study, the blogs were active, and could be found at:

- www.forevermissvanity.com - a fashion blog
- Debus42.wordpress.com (Ramblings of a Gaming Girl) - computer gaming
- www.chrismurphy180.weebly.com - darts
- www.safetyinsound.com - popular music
- www.vanguardonline.co.uk - rock music
- www.shoot.co.uk - football

They were interviewed individually between April 2013 and June 2014, and open unstructured questions were used to allow them to describe their online activity. In addition they were each asked the following questions:

- Why did you start to write a blog?
- How do you manage your blogging activity?
- What have you learned through blogging?

The sample size is relatively small, and this should be viewed as a pilot study upon which future work can be built. However, the nature of the responses was similar, which would suggest that it is not unreasonable to extrapolate meaning from the research which could form the focus of further investigations.

It is important to note that their blogs were not part of a programme assessed work, and although they were each encouraged to blog at the start of their undergraduate studies, the students were given complete freedom over their choice of content and the management of their blog spaces. Any learning through blogging was largely unmediated, and informal as described in Moon (2004).

Moon (2004) also makes the point that for learning to take place, there needs to be an element of reflection on the experience undergone. As the blogging was largely unmediated and unassessed, none of the students in this study formally reflected on their blogging activity, for example by using a reflective log. However, it became evident in discussion with them that each actively used ongoing reflection to improve their blogging activity, and this has been drawn out in the analysis below.

In an attempt to assess what has been learned through the experience of blogging, it was necessary to consider mapping the students' responses against some form of learning matrix. As one of the key outcomes of experiential learning is enhanced employability (Niblock, 2013; Moon, 2004), it was decided to attempt to understand where transferrable graduate attributes are developed through blogging. For this purpose the matrix developed by Prospects (the UK government graduate service), was chosen. This is a widely accepted matrix which lists skills, abilities and work behaviours that employers seek in undergraduates. (Prospects.ac.uk, accessed 4.7.13) See table 1.

Skills	Abilities	Behaviours
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Teamwork	Creativity	Can take responsibility for your own ideas
Problem solving	Initiative	Think creatively about problems
Communication	Enterprise	Lead yourself and others in new practices
Time management		Cope with uncertainty
IT skills		Initiate change
Numeracy		Thrive on challenge
Customer awareness		

Table 1: What employers look for in graduates. (Source: Prospects.ac.uk accessed 4.7.13)

Analysis

Responses to interview questions were considered against each of these attributes with a view to ascertaining whether there was evidence of learning happening. Below is an analysis of the student responses to the semi-structured questions about their blogging experience.

Initiative and Enterprise

Most of the participants in this study said they were encouraged to write blogs by tutors, on the basis that blogging was useful in demonstrating their capacity as writers, and was something which should enhance their employment prospects. While there is some evidence of a mediated experience here, as Moon (2004) points out, mediation occurs on a graduated scale, and in each case under consideration in this study, the mediation by tutors was limited to the suggestion that the student should blog, and did not go beyond that point. The blogging experiences were largely unmediated in a formal sense.

One student said that at 16 and studying in further education, few of her peers saw the value of blogging, but she was encouraged to continue after reading a magazine industry article advertising an internship.

"There is a Glamour magazine internship and this article said having a blog is handy as it gives you more experience. I went to a Glamour event in Manchester and spoke to the editor Jo Elvin who said one of the things they looked for when recruiting was a blog, as it shows personality and commitment in regularly putting posts out and in researching trends."

She went on to set up forevermissvanity.com to cover lifestyle, fashion and beauty stories, and in late 2012 developed her blog into a simple website. In 2013 she posted 250 articles, received 1,700 comments on her articles from readers. In January 2014 the site had 1,481 followers (people who request alerts and updates).

Ramblings of a Gaming Girl blogger began writing while working as an administration clerk on leaving school. She said she had missed the creativity of writing experienced at school, and began her own gaming blog which helped her develop a portfolio of writing which in turn aided her acceptance onto a university journalism programme. Using Wordpress as her platform, she had also developed her blogs into an extensive archive of news and reviews about gaming platforms and newly released games with 432 followers subscribing to her blog by January 2014, and 42 followers through the social website Facebook. (debus42.wordpress.com accessed 28/1/14)

Another student was encouraged to develop a sports blog during his first week on a university sports journalism programme. His lecturer told him that it was a good way of getting his work noticed. In 2012, during the second year of his degree programme, he updated his blog weekly, and averaged around 700 unique hits per post (visits to specific blog pages), the highest number for one post reaching 12,000. He developed a speciality in darts news and the success of his blog was such that on graduating he was offered a post with a major sports management company to develop an online presence for their clients, who were international darts players.

Each respondent saw the potential of online media for showcasing their work and expanding their network of industry and genre specific contacts, and each had substantial traffic with thousands of unique page views. They saw blogging as a means to enhance employment opportunities by enabling them to demonstrate a key skill set specific to media industries. Arguably, setting up and maintaining long running blogs demonstrate all three Prospects abilities (creativity, enterprise and initiative), but also behaviours such as thriving on challenge, initiating change, and taking responsibility for your own ideas.

Communications and IT skills

The students demonstrated an awareness of the importance of literacy in blogs. In journalism education, the emphasis is on developing sophisticated writing techniques, so it is unsurprising that each blogger was sensitive to the need to communicate with clarity and accuracy in a way which will interest readers. One said she was aware initially that her writing contained errors, and quickly learned the need to improve her self-editing skills following negative comments from readers. *"I do make mistakes, so now if I am unsure about my writing, I get someone to check it for me. My self-editing of copy has improved a lot."*

One student admitted that initially the quality of his writing was poor and that the structure of his stories was weak, but this improved through practice and reader feedback. *"I learned that I need to keep the word count down, and that the most important point has to go at the start. I have learned to write so that people want to read on."* Importantly, the feedback on the quality of writing was not from teaching staff, but from anonymous members of the online community.

Another agreed that blog feedback from readers emphasised the need to check and edit copy to ensure it is grammatically correct and error free. *"I have a massive portfolio of work and can see how I have improved over time. There is a better flow in my writing now and I am learning how to correct my own mistakes to make sure the work sounds right. I am better at writing to length now too, as if there is too much, people won't read it."*

In one interview, a student admitted that while she had begun her blog to give herself space to write creatively, readers had an impact on her attention to detail and ensuring the work was error free. She added: *"I started to write for myself, but now I think I am also writing for my readers. I think about my readers when I write. I am more conscious of what I write so I critique my work closely."*

All bloggers expressed irritation at blogs written by others which contained errors and were badly structured, and each also demonstrated a developing awareness of the need for their writing to appear professional.

It could be argued here that in the interaction with their readers in the blog community students are undertaking a form of reflective observation, where reader feedback was used to improve their writing. This point underscores the observations made by Rettberg (2014) who describes blogs as "immersive" environments, and complex "ecosystems". Blogging is not an exercise in one-directional publication, but more a conversation with an interested community of readers which encourages continuing reflection and development.

Creativity and thinking creatively about problems

Bloggers have to have something to write about which is engaging and interesting as without this they are unlikely to attract and keep readers. According to Buss (2006) *"...compelling content is the most important requisite of an interesting blog"* in attracting and maintaining readers. Creativity is certainly valued as a transferable skill in media industries (Wallis cited in Radford 2010)

One sports blogger said finding something interesting to write about every week was one of the main challenges. He advocated avoiding personal self-reflective writing as this was often boring to the reader. He focussed on finding news stories he could follow up, and developed niche writing about darts. *"You have to keep getting content out there even when there is not much going on, and you have to be creative to do that, to make news."*

Other students agreed that developing story ideas was an important skill which had been drawn out through blogging. Each of the participants evaluated the success of a particular blog post using data such as the number of hits it had received, whether it had been "tweeted" (mentioned in a third party micro blog via the Twitter platform) and "retweeted" (forwarded on through a chain of interested readers on Twitter). A fashion blogger said: *"I can tell what subjects engage audiences from the comments I get, and can work out what has gone well and what hasn't, particularly if there are no hits."*

A music blogger said: *"I write about things that excite me but I also monitor popular content. When I wrote about One Direction (a popular band), the response was mad."*

Students were sensitive to the use of validation tools such as the "like" button – which readers press when they have enjoyed a particular post. Participants said that if the peer group "liked" a particular piece it suggested that this is the sub-genre they are interested in reading more about.

The drive for creative content led each blogger to a more thoroughly developed understanding of their subject area, a greater awareness of news and current story trends upon which to build their own writing.

The monitoring of reader interest and interpretation of blog data again indicates a degree of reflective observation. It is also possible to see that blogging does provide a complex environment where learning can take place. It could be argued that in this online environment where readers, followers and "likes" steer the direction and presentation of written content, the notion of a virtual "placement supervisor" is emerging where the community is moderating professional behaviours.

Time management

Students treated their blogs with professional commitment and were all aware of the need to blog regularly and frequently.

One student said: *"If you blog every week, on a particular day each week, then you develop an expectation in the reader. If you promise a particular frequency of publication, then you have to meet that expectation or you will lose a lot of readers."* He made the point that to gain success as a blogger, you have to have the self discipline to meet self-directed deadlines or risk losing your audience, and demonstrated a keen sensitivity to changes in blog data and reader trends.

Another said she posted at least three articles each week: *"I spend two hours each week blogging. I find ideas from what comes to mind, life, looking to see what's on in the fashion world."* Regularity of posts and retaining a good following are important to her, particularly as she became recognised as the voice of young people in the fashion world, being quoted in established fashion magazines. At one point she had 98,000 unique page views in 2012 - a measure of the number of visitors to a website - rising to 124,658 in 2013. The gaming blogger uploaded weekly blogs, and sometimes would blog more frequently, having attracted around 1,000 unique views each month in 2012. In 2013 she had 4,794 unique visitors with 6,830 page views. *"Time management is important, you have to find time on a regular basis to write your blog."*

The learning of time management skills then are driven by the imperative to attract, engage and maintain readers through regular and predictable posts, another indication that the online environment is providing some form of work-integrated learning supervisory element.

Customer awareness and problem solving

Each of the participants demonstrated an understanding of sophisticated online methodologies to promote their work and gain a blog "following". Each used social networks, including Facebook and Twitter, to drive traffic towards their blogs, and conversely used their blogs to drive traffic towards social networks, techniques which are commonly used to generate interest in online content. (Jordan 2008)

For example, one discussed his blog in terms of identifying the posts which attracted the most hits and developing work in that niche, in his case coverage of darts players and events.

"I followed reader trends. In the beginning I had to beg retweets, I put my email address on my blog and linked the blog into my email signature, then started to pick up on which blogs had most hits and feedback. In the beginning you do a lot of work to promote your blog, hopelessly tweeting hundreds of people in the hope that some retweet you. All I do now is send a tweet saying the blog is up and people now follow me and go straight to the blog."

One music student was appointed as a volunteer blogger for a larger organisation which aggregated music blogs of events in Northern England through their website. After working on this site for a few months, he realised that it could attract more readers if it was configured differently. He organised a meeting with the site's director who gave him permission to improve the site.

"The old website was hard to get round so I offered to build a new one which is tonnes better. I redid the website and set it up for better search engine optimisation (a way of attracting more readers), and got Facebook and Twitter going as it was old-school before...now we have a Facebook group going and this is where people post comments now....my coding skills got a lot better through doing all of that."

In each interview with student bloggers, the management of the blog space was discussed and each demonstrated an awareness of the reader as being essential to the success of the enterprise. The conscious development of a reader base using blog data also demonstrated numeracy and sophisticated levels of IT skills.

Additional skills and attributes

There are some transferable skills and attributes not covered in the Prospects matrix which were raised in interview by each of the participants, and are worthy of some consideration:

- **Networking**

Each felt they had tapped into a professional network through their work online, had learned how to interact with networks, and each cited this as a transferable skill which they felt they had developed. One had developed professional contacts with most of the major darts players in the UK and also the media organisations interested in following darts. Another was invited to cover London Fashion Week through her fashion industry. One music blogger said that being able to network had helped him secure a graduate job in communications within weeks of completing his degree programme.

"When I went for interview, there were six other candidates there that day, and they all had marketing degrees, and this job was for a marketing coordinator. I felt a bit of an underdog. In interview, I was asked to talk about networking, and of course through my blog I had developed contacts with more than 100 public relations companies, so I talked about that. Afterwards, I was told that being able to demonstrate experience at networking was what got me the job."

Another blogger had developed sports journalism networks through shared press facilities. He blogged football matches from his team's ground and said:

"I liked to post my match report at the whistle (the end of the game) and asked the press officer if there was anywhere at the ground I could do this as I needed to get the report out straight away. He invited me to use the press box, and I was allowed to sit there through each game and live blog the match, alongside the professional journalists."

He said the professionals he networked with gave him advice and helped nurture his interest in sports writing.

- **Self-confidence**

Each blogger independently said that their self-confidence had improved through their writing and positive feedback from readers. It could be argued that self-confidence enables them to demonstrate some of the behaviours expected of graduates. They each discussed their ventures in terms of changing and adapting them to meet reader expectation (initiating change) and also in having the confidence to explore new ideas (coping with uncertainty).

One cited feedback from readers, who said his writing was too safe, and this gave him confidence to be braver and more controversial in expressing his opinion.

- **Adaptability**

Each was committed to establishing their blogs and adapting their practise to maximise their number of followers. For example they each discussed testing the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to increase the number of page views they received and adapting their technical approach to blogging to better attract readers.

Summary

Let us first consider the question of whether blogging offers a valid environment for work-integrated learning. It is evident from those who engage in blogging that that the environments are complex, challenging and demanding, offering real experience of journalism, as opposed to simulated experience, in that journalistic work is published to a live audience. Usher and Soloman (1999) make a clear distinction between learning from experience and experiential learning. Learning from experience is that which takes place in the real world of everyday contexts and it is apparent that blogging allows for learning from experience. Beard and Wilson (2006) discuss the importance of the learning environment and make the point that for learning to take place the environment needs to be appropriate to the learning context. While they were for the most part discussing physical learning spaces, arguably their point is equally relevant when considering online spaces. If the student's aim is to work in journalism where online activity is becoming increasingly important, it could be argued that blog environments do offer appropriate learning spaces.

If we accept that blog environments have the potential to be valid work-integrated learning spaces, then the second consideration relates to the nature of the learning offered through blogging. Usher and Soloman (1999) argue that for experiential learning to happen, there needs to be an element of formal reflection on the experience itself to gain a deeper understanding of practice. Moon (2004) concurs and states that formal reflection is important in facilitating the students' understanding of what has been learned. None of the participants in this study formally reflected upon their learning through blogging. However, this was largely because their blogging experience was unmediated, they were not formally subjected to the curriculum considerations associated with work-integrated learning and their learning

was both informal and incidental as defined by Watkins and Marsick's work on learning modes (1992). What is evident is that each blogger did reflect on their work in an informal way, using audience interaction to improve their performance. They were unknowingly following the Kolb cycle of experiential learning (1984) where they had a concrete experience (writing a blog post), analysed it and reflected on it using audience feedback, and improved their practice as a result. This would indicate that opportunity for reflection is inherent in the practice of blogging, and that for experiential learning to be more secure, an element of mediation may be necessary to ensure that students reflect formally on their practice.

It can be argued that transferable skills are developed through the experience of blogging and Table 2 attempts to identify where this study's participants have demonstrated the graduate employability attributes as defined by Prosects.ac.uk

Skills	Met	Abilities	Met	Behaviours	Met
Teamwork	No	Creativity	√	Can take responsibility for your own ideas	√
Problem solving	√	Initiative	√	Think creatively about problems	√
Communication	√	Enterprise	√	Lead yourself and others in new practices	√
Time management	√			Cope with uncertainty	√
IT skills	√			Initiate change	√
Numeracy	√			Thrive on challenge	√
Customer awareness	√				

Table 2: Where bloggers meet graduate attributes as defined by Prosects

Evidence from the participants and their blogs does indicate that blogs have a value in developing the majority of transferable skills.

Turning then to the third question regarding curriculum considerations, this study suggests that when considering blogging as part of a curriculum for work-integrated learning, introducing formal structures can only enhance the opportunity blogging offers as a tool for experiential learning.

Billett (2011b) has constructed a framework of good practice for the management of work-integrated learning. He encourages a three-staged pedagogical approach: preparation for experiential learning, monitoring and guidance during practice-based experience, and

reflection on what has been learned. He also sets out a number of curriculum considerations for organising and enacting practice-based experience, including

- being clear about what is to be learnt for identifying what experiences are likely to secure that learning
- acknowledging practice settings as providing important and worthwhile educational experiences as plan accordingly
- considering options other than supervised placements to secure learning experiences
- students' interest and engagement are salient for enacting and realising effective learning outcomes in practice settings

In the context of media industries, the enacted curriculum should include discussions on blog content, promotion and management as well as enterprise and monetisation of creative work. While those students who took part in this study were encouraged to blog by lecturers, this was purely as a means of showcasing their work to gain wider notice by media industries, not as a substitute for work-integrated learning. Indeed, the wider benefits of blogging only became evident through this research. For example, while those students who took part in this study did demonstrate a capacity to interview, not all bloggers do, and this is one of the key vocational skills which perhaps should be encouraged through the preparatory stage of work-integrated learning management. This would then satisfy Billett's intended curriculum consideration of "aligning the kinds of experiences provided for students with the intended learning outcomes". A curriculum which encourages blogging should include discussion of the skills, abilities and behaviours to be developed through the practice, contextualised to the vocational area. In the context of journalism, the curriculum should cover the importance of journalistic interviewing, research and writing, content development, editing work to eliminate errors, the relationship with readers, the frequency of posts, the use of social media to increase the number of page views, and how to analyse data, for example.

Billett (2011b) suggests there should be direct guidance by more experienced practitioners during practice-based experience. It could be argued that one of the advantages conferred by blogging is the direct feedback offered by the online community. Each of the students who took part in this study recognised the signalling from their audience. However, direct guidance by lecturers would enable student bloggers to more securely improve their writing and perhaps allow for learning in those areas which are not immediately obvious, such as enterprise and the monetisation of their work.

Finally, underlining Moon's point about the importance of reflection (2006) Billett recommends after-practice reflection, including making *"links to and reconciliations between what is taught (learnt) in the academy and what is experienced in practice settings"*. In interview, each of the students admitted they while they engaged in on-going reflection around the content and nature of their blogs (the practice setting), they had not consciously reconciled this with what they had been taught to any great extent. It was only through taking part in the study they had recognised what had been learnt through their experiences and how it linked to aspects of the curriculum. This underpins the need to bring blogging into the work-integrated learning curriculum to enhance reflection on practice and secure what is learned through practice.

While this study has focussed on blogging within the context of journalism and media industries, it could be argued that if the pedagogic practices propounded by Billett are taken into consideration, the value of teaching blogging as an opportunity for experiential learning could be extended into other disciplines, particularly where appropriate learning outcomes can be aligned to context.

Blogging does not easily facilitate teamwork, which is clearly set out as a skill under the Prospects' matrix. While bloggers interact with their readers, and sophisticated relationships develop between the writer and their "followers" because of the impact of social media, blogging is for the most part a solitary occupation and in terms of experiential learning within the context of journalism, it cannot simulate the environment of a busy newsroom where teams of journalists work under the guidance of an editor. Higher education institutions may need to consider the importance of teamwork as a learning outcome relevant to their discipline. It may be necessary to frame blogging as an opportunity which adds another dimension to work-integrated learning rather than considering it as a complete alternative to traditional placement experience. It should sit alongside and enhance more traditional opportunities to ensure that students are facilitated in aspects of learning that are difficult to access through an online-only environment. However, it should also be recognised that blogging does offer opportunities to develop transferable skills which are not always easy to draw out through traditional placements, and therefore the teaching of blogging in a work-integrated learning curriculum has a value.

In conclusion, blogging environments could be considered valid tools for the development of experiential learning in a work-integrated learning curriculum where students can be facilitated in the development of journalism skills and wider graduate attributes. However, for students to fully exploit this opportunity, blogging needs to sit within a formalised pedagogical framework where journalism-specific curriculum considerations are taken into account, and good practice is observed in the preparation, supervision and evaluation of the experience.

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