

Chapter 20

Reflections on the Role of Self-Paced, Online Resources in Higher Education or How YouTube is Teaching Me How to Knit

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In higher education sectors around the world, lecturing remains the mainstay of teaching and learning practice (see Bligh, 1998; Jones, 2007). This is despite the fact that countless high-profile and widely read scholars have shown that the pedagogic value of lecturing is questionable (see Bligh, 1998; Gibbs, 1981; Laurillard, 2002). How it has come to be that lecturing persists remains the focus of much speculation (see Jones, 2007). It may be the case, however, that lectures have finally met their match in the form of online, self-paced, on-demand resources. As the availability and number of these resources grows, the viability of face-to-face lecturing as a teaching and learning strategy becomes increasingly tenuous. In this chapter, the authors outline the impact that these resources are having on pedagogy and curriculum design in general and in higher education in particular. They offer a case study of

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Self-Paced, Online Resources in Higher Education

the use of this strategy in a higher education context within an English Literature module. The authors conclude by offering some reflections on their own experiences as on-demand learners and offer some suggestions as to how university teachers and the institutions for which they work may need to rethink the way they operate.

PREAMBLE

I'm learning how to knit. Well, actually, I'm teaching myself how to knit. The majority of novice knitters learn the craft at the knee of someone more accomplished, often their mother or grandmother. That was initially the case for me. I took my opportunity while my parents were visiting us in the United Kingdom from Australia in the summer of 2010. Mum showed me how to cast on, how to knit and purl, and how to hold the needles and wool to get a consistent tension. Before long I was off. But so was she. As she was winging her way back to Australia, I was rapidly running out of wool and I had no idea how to cast off. Instinctively I reached for my smart phone, tapped on the YouTube app and entered the search terms: 'casting off knitting'. Within a few seconds I was listening to and watching a North American woman demonstrating how to cast off, explaining what she was doing as she went. I paused the video, picked up my needles and followed her instructions. When she got ahead of me, I pressed pause. When I needed to watch it again I replayed it. Before long my knitting and my needles were successfully separated and my knitting journey could continue. Since then, as I've tackled more challenging projects, I've turned to YouTube whenever I encounter something I don't know how to do. This has included interpreting patterns, adding new wool, increasing, decreasing, using circular needles and, with unfortunate frequency, how to fix dropped stitches. So, while I'm teaching myself how to knit, it's probably more accurate to say that YouTube is teaching me how to knit.

BACKGROUND

As Steve Jones (2007) has explained, lectures became established in western higher education at the time of the rise of the medieval universities almost certainly abetted 'by the scarcity of books' (Cubberley, 1920; Jones, 2007, p. 399). Understood in this way, lectures offered a kind of transcription technology, ensuring all students had a good set of notes from which to learn in their own time.

Lecturing, however, almost certainly faces its most powerful challenge yet: the information revolution. With the advent of the world-wide-web, information in a wide variety of formats and from an equally wide variety of sources is becoming increasingly available. In recent years we have seen a veritable boom in the devel-

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