
Chapter VIII

Creative E-Transitions

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ABSTRACT

The creative use of e-learning to facilitate the transition to and from university is the subject of this chapter. It describes a pilot, online transition to university project entitled Click Around ECU (Edith Cowan University) and an online, generic skills and career planning project called Careering Ahead in Health Promotion. Both projects are informed by authentic learning pedagogy that seeks to engage students in problem solving and learning by engaging in purposeful activities. The projects also seek to empower students to decide for themselves what they need to know about the transition process. Each project is described in the context of its implications for e-learning. The core thesis is that e-learning produces creative outcomes when embedded in appropriate pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

'You can't teach creative writing,' said Lancaster. 'You provide the chance. The occasion. You encourage. You facilitate. You offer the window of opportunity.'

'I am a window cleaner, as it were,' said Dr. Bee. 'Or rather you are.'
'Exactly,' said Lancaster.

These lines from Michael Wilding's satirical novel, *Academia Nuts* (2002), suggest that creativity is facilitated rather than taught. If this is true of the traditional classroom setting that Wilding describes, it is equally true of e-learning. Like books, e-learning is a teaching and learning resource that can be put to creative use. E-learning is not in itself creative: Put simply, "Putting a course on the Web does not guarantee [creative learning] ... any more than a library on campus does" (Allport, 2001). Rather, e-learning offers a

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“window of opportunity” for teachers, as facilitators (window cleaners), to scaffold creative learning experiences for their students. In other words, it’s not the resource you’ve got but the way that you use it that counts.

The potential of e-learning is released by the pedagogy that informs its application. Without this, there is a risk of “confusion of technology with education, and tools with learning” (Brabazon, 2002). The purpose of e-learning is to enhance students’ creativity and ability to construct their own knowledge. The two projects described in this chapter both harness the creative potential of e-learning by expanding opportunities for high school pupils and university students to become engaged actively in learning beyond the confines of classroom walls. They are both transition projects. The first, Click Around ECU (Edith Cowan University), is an online transition to university project for school-leavers. The originality of Click Around ECU is that it seeks to empower high school pupils to decide for themselves what they want to know about university life through the production of their own web-based, multimedia clips (web-shows). The second project, Careering Ahead in Health Promotion, is a web-based, career-planning program, designed for use throughout students’ undergraduate studies to enable them to incorporate generic skills into study programs in preparation for graduate transition to employment.

ISSUES, CONTROVERSIES AND PROBLEMS

The transition to university, facilitated by projects such as Click Around ECU, is important because it affects the well being and success of young people. It also has implications for student retention rates. In turn, this affects the nation’s purse. A British government report (HEFCE, 1997), for example, estimated the cost to taxpayers of attrition rates in higher education at around ninety million pounds per annum. Needless to say, statistics like this have concentrated the minds of public servants and university management teams on the importance of the transition to university and the enhancement of the first year university experience. In Australia, for example, the Commonwealth Government commissioned projects on the first-year, university experience (McGinnis & James, 1995). The level of academic interest in the transition to university may also be gauged from the fact that a whole edition of the *Journal of Institutional Research* (Vol 9(1), May 2000) was devoted to this topic.

Such literature reveals that the transition to university is a complex process because the experience varies in accordance with students’ backgrounds and the nature of the institutions in which they enrol. International students, for example, face particular problems arising from cultural differences; and mature-aged students have transitional needs that differ from those of school leavers. Diversity can give rise to particular problems because “diverse” indicates different, and, very often, unequal. As Elson-Green (1999) reported: “A university education continues to be an elusive dream for some of the most disadvantaged groups in Australian society despite years of equity programs aimed at giving everyone a ‘fair chance.’ The Equity in Higher Education study ... reveals the university system is failing indigenous students and people from rural, isolated and low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds.” The tyranny of distance in the vast Australian continent gives rise to particular equity and university access issues for rural, remote and indigenous students that appropriate use of e-learning can address.

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