

Chapter 17

Fantasy Workshop: Active Use of a Learning Management System (LMS) as an Approach to Blended Learning

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ABSTRACT

Fantasy Workshop is a project focused on the active use of a Learning Management System (LMS), its-learning, in teaching and learning in a K-12 blended environment. As teachers in this study, the authors used an LMS as a learning platform in their 6th grade literature class. The focus for the class was creative writing and learning about Fantasy, a fiction genre. The aim of the project was to enable all students, not only those students who love to read and write, to learn about the Fantasy genre in a way that would build on their previous knowledge and interests. In addition, the project was aimed at facilitating students' writing processes in such a way that was meaningful and motivating for all students. Most importantly, as teachers, the authors used this project to establish an effective blended environment that worked for teaching and learning in the 6th grade classroom.

INTRODUCTION

The background for this chapter is a project we were involved in while we were at Nord Trøndelag University College in Norway in spring 2012. The main focus of this chapter is to share the teaching and learning experiences in our elementary creative writing classroom where we implemented blended instruction. We wanted to find out whether integrating a digital environment

into our face-to-face class will help engage all students in the writing process as they learn about different literature genres. The results presented in this chapter demonstrate how the use of digital media can provide elementary students a greater sense of value in working with creative writing and learning about genre in K-12 schools.

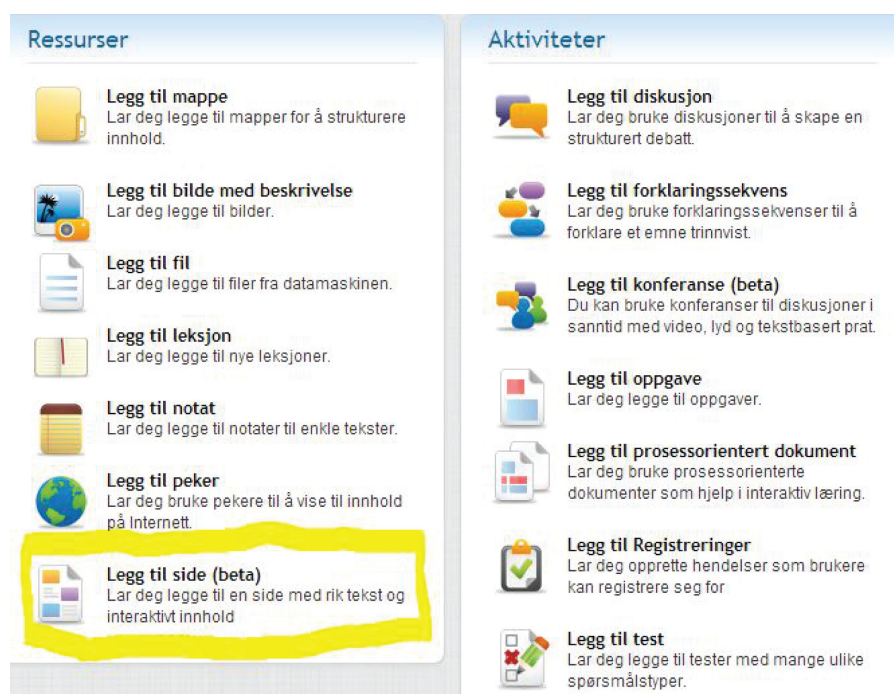
For our digital environment, we adopted an LMS called “itslearning”. “itslearning” is a learning management system that is used in many

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4912-5.ch017

schools, colleges and universities in Norway. It is also used in several teaching institutions worldwide. One of the functions of this LMS is that it allows one to construct theme pages, plan and publish creative work, and assess the creative works of others using different types of media. In our classroom, most of the students' work was conducted in a tool known as "Page". The interface of the Page tool is quite similar to the wall in the Facebook social media networking system (see Figures 1 & 2). The Page tool was mainly used to inspire our 6th grade students to connect with and provide feedback to their peers as they worked on their individual projects for the class. During the project our students were encouraged to seek advice from their peers regarding their texts and published music, movie clips and pictures related to the Fantasy genre. Some of the students even made their own short movies with book reviews that were published on the page. Hence forth, we will refer to the project as "Fantasy workshop".

The learning objective for the Fantasy workshop was for our students to work on a project that will enable them gain a broader understanding of the Fantasy genre. In order to achieve this objective each student was asked to publish and share on the class' Theme Page using text, internet resources, as well as the tools in the itslearning LMS. Students were encouraged to include sound, pictures, and weblinks in their project. The idea was to get the students to use the Page tool to inspire and support each other through the process of writing their own story. An underlying goal for us as teachers was to find out if this process was an effective way of teaching and working with students on their writing and whether the students would benefit from the Fantasy Workshop. As previously stated, in this chapter we share our insight on how we as teachers used a blended approach as we worked with our students. The main questions we had were: How can we work and involve all our students in the classroom with the use of a blended environment? Will the

Figure 1.



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