

Teaching innovation in the Communication field in university level education: the case of the Cuatro Círculos platform.

Antonio B. Espinosa-Ramírez, Ana C. Parras, Silvia Liñares & Jonathan McGregor

Escuela Superior de Comunicación y Marketing (ESCO), Calle San Antón, 73 – 18005, Granada, Spain.

Summary - Crynodeb

The integration of new technologies in society has brought about substantial change. The subsequent Cultural Revolution stemming from this has in turn caused profound change in both professional and business fields, as well as in education. It is, therefore, of vital importance that these changes be reflected in the university education system. The roles of teacher and student have changed significantly, as have the tools upon which educational processes are developed. In the case of studies in Communication, Advertising and Marketing, these changes have been very significant and now require traditional learning channels to be improved. On these grounds, we shall present an innovative teaching project: a virtual space in which professional and educational environments are combined, and in which students play a key role.

Mae integreiddio technolegau newydd mewn cymdeithas wedi arwain at newid sylweddol. Mae'r Chwyldro Diwylliannol sydd wedi deillio o hyn wedi achosi, yn ei dro, newid mawr mewn meysydd proffesiynol a busnes, yn ogystal â mewn addysg. Mae'n hollbwysig, felly, fod y newidiadau hyn yn cael eu hadlewyrchu yn system addysg y brifysgol. Mae rolau'r athro a'r myfyriwr wedi newid yn sylweddol, yn ogystal â'r dulliau y datblygwyd y prosesau addysgol arnynt. Yn achos astudiaethau mewn Cyfathrebu, Hysbysebu a Marchnata, bu'r newidiadau yn rhai arwyddocaol dros ben a bellach mae angen gwella llwybrau dysgu traddodiadol. Ar y seiliau hyn, byddwn yn cyflwyno prosiect addysgu arloesol: lle rhithwir lle cyfunir amgylcheddau proffesiynol ac addysgol, a lle mae myfyrwyr yn chwarae rôl allweddol.

Keywords: Digital culture, Journalism, Audio-visual Communication, Advertising, Marketing, University teaching, Teaching innovation, Good practice.

Introduction

The emergence of information and communication technology (ICT) in society in the twenty-first century has brought with it enormously transcendental cultural change that has affected all areas of life, completely immersing us in a new society - the digital society (Castells; 2005) and a new culture (Levy; 2007). This change has affected – and will continue to gradually do so – educational processes at all levels.

The tasks required of teachers have radically changed, and as a result they must adapt to these changes in order to understand the new model being developed by the education community. This new model, or new models, should be flexible and open; they should be models in which the teacher becomes a facilitator of instructional situations faced by the student, as well as a mentor in that process (Cabrero; 1996). A teacher is no longer only a professional of their field of expertise, but rather someone who acquires new competences in the field of education with the aim of meeting objectives – including that of preparing students for the job market. For this they must choose the methodologies that they deem most appropriate for each stage of the student learning process (Blanco & Lázaro; 2013). In this way, alongside traditional lectures, in which knowledge and information are transmitted, other teaching methods which make autonomous and direct work possible for the student must be developed. In our

case, the European Higher Education Area provides us with a framework for reference and exchange which has influenced the transformation of pedagogical attitudes in university education.

Case study: the innovative learning project “Cuatro Círculos”

We intend to present a case study of a project that is currently being carried at the Escuela Superior de Comunicación y Marketing, ESCO (Granada, Spain). ESCO is a partner institution of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) and offers Bachelor's degrees in Journalism, Audio-visual Communication, Advertising and Public Relations, and Marketing. The four degrees that are currently offered at ESCO have been considerably influenced by the emergence of ICT, causing profound changes in our working tools, the ways in which we work and the content to be developed. These changes in the working environment should have a logical correlation with the contents included in courses, the tools used to transmit that knowledge and students' abilities.

During academic year 2015-16, the educational team at ESCO set out to work on a new innovative teaching project that would allow us to encapsulate these changes and accommodate the educational needs of students. As well as logical changes in the content of certain subjects, we embarked upon a purely digital project, armed with student collaboration, which would provide both a new learning environment as well as a professional working space. Thus, the Cuatro Círculos project was born, designed by students and coordinated by teaching staff.

The idea of Cuatro Círculos (literally four circles) is that each circle represents each of the four Bachelor's degrees that are offered at our learning institution. Thus, the project was born – a digital magazine (cuatrocircuitos.com) in which students at ESCO would participate and whose learning outcomes would be: putting into practice and developing work-related competences; broadcasting the work of students and professionals; coordinating the content of different subjects in a professional digital environment; and encouraging autonomous learning guided by teachers in a digital environment.

From the beginning it was decided that the project would have several phases (not necessarily in this order):

1. The magazine would be set up and student participation would be encouraged.
2. ESCO Radio would be created.
3. ESCO TV would be created.
4. Cinema workshops would be set up.
5. A Business and Marketing Debate Club would be set up.

The first phase included the setting-up of the project, the first samples of written, graphic and audio-visual work, public attendance at acts which ESCO students attended as professionals and publicising the magazine. The idea was to give the project substance and this was done successfully. Now we look to the future for the subsequent phases, which will consolidate the project, and these will be embarked upon over time, utilising small TV and radio studios that we have available to us.

The main obstacles that we have encountered from the outset have been achieving long term commitment from the students and for the project to be perceived as a professional space and not a student magazine. To overcome these, with the collaboration of the teaching staff, we made Cuatro Círculos a space where the best work from each subject would be put on display. We had a public inauguration for the magazine and also obtained accreditation as a media publication, giving students the opportunity to work alongside professionals from other types of media in press conferences, public acts, etc.

For the circulation of our magazine we were active on social networks in a bid to spread the word in what we deem to be the natural environment of a digital publication. This allowed the students to apply the competences they have acquired in their studies in a digital communication environment, as well as to actively get up to date with the tools necessary for their professional development, such as the use of Wordpress, Photoshop and Facebook Business, amongst others.

The magazine is structured in sections which were agreed upon by the students and whose content aims to distance itself from the sections that typically appear in conventional magazines so as to achieve a structure and content in line with new digital means of communication. In the second phase of the project, after consolidation of the abovementioned sections, the focus will be on developing the website's multimedia content (podcasting and videos). With this we aim to provide students with basic skills in multimedia editing, as well as promoting the interdisciplinary nature of Cuatro Círculos as a fundamental tool in subjects such as Journalistic Composition and Digital Communication.

In order to facilitate students' commitment to the on-going work involved, we took advantage of a Wordpress function which allows us to assign different roles to students for the running of the magazine. These roles are assigned according to the responsibilities that each student is able to take on, whether that be taking into consideration their academic year and level, or their level of maturity and commitment to the project. In this way, students begin as authors, and their role is adjusted depending on the technical knowledge they acquire. The highest position, which involves publishing and editing (administrator), is only assigned to students who are more advanced in their studies (3rd and 4th year), and always under the supervision of the magazine editor.

Conclusions

In our opinion, the first stage of the Cuatro Círculos (CC) project has been successfully completed having enjoyed an excellent response from students, who have shown strong commitment to it. On the other hand, we have noted very little enthusiasm from the Business with Marketing students who have yet to find their working space in CC and who do not see it as a place for their own work to be put on display. After discussions with them, this lack of commitment could possibly be down to the fact that they are more driven by the external working environment and the business world, not having found their own place in CC yet. This is something that we intend to change as we establish synergies that allow them to understand the importance that digital communication has in the world of business and marketing. One of our aims is to start a Marketing club, which will allow CC to become a place of reference for debates on advances in this subject area.

Another problem we face is the continuity of the team of students over time. If the original idea was to involve only students in their final year, as of last year students from earlier years who have demonstrated valuable skills and commitment have been allowed and encouraged to get involved, thus ensuring more continuity for the project.

The next step will be to embark upon the next phases by creating a podcast for Radio ESCO. There are currently several students working on the development of different programmes. As for ESCO TV, this phase will be embarked upon at a later date and will include specific programmes on current affairs. Finally, the Cinema Workshop is another phase that will be tackled in academic years to come and which will also incorporate ESCO Radio and TV.

REFERENCES

- Blanco y Pont, J. M. & Lázaro Pernías, P. 2013. Tecnología y transformación de la práctica docente en la formación en Comunicación en la era 2.0: un caso de estudio. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 19, 623-631
- Cabero, J. 1996. *Nuevas tecnologías, comunicación y educación*". *EduTec: Revista Electrónica de Tecnología Educativa*. Available at <http://www.edutec.es/revista/index.php/edutec-e/article/view/576/305>. Viewed online on 20 September 2017.
- Castells, M. 2005. *La era de la información: economía, sociedad y cultura*. Buenos Aires, México, Siglo XXI.
- Lévy, P. 2007 *Cibercultura: informe al Consejo de Europa*. México, Anthropos, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.