Integrating E-Learning to Enhance the Writing Skills of the Learners

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The advent of technology has revolutionized all the spheres of human beings life and education sector is not an exception to this. Eleven years into the 21st century, the revolutionary concept in Computer technology and the internet offer limitless advantages to educators. This technology appended learning has become a model in the mainstream pedagogy. The theory and practice of on-line learning have certainly ushered in new opportunities to the academicians and learners alike, with regard to writing. Much has been proposed regarding the "wide and diverse forms of teaching and learning that can be supported on the Web" (Anderson, 2004: 55).

Before we proceed further a quick understanding of what is e-learning would be worthwhile. In the plain terms, e-learning means education and training through digital media. The digital media could be a computer, a personal digital assistant, a mobile phone, a digital television or any other electronic gadget that could deliver through a network. Network here could mean Internet, LAN, or a corporate WAN.

The term e-learning has been defined substantially resulting in an abundance of definitions. For our convenience let us understand the two definitions that encompass the nucleus of this concept in a concise manner. According to Education Encyclopedia (StateUniversity.com), the term e-learning refers to any electronically assisted instruction, but is most often associated with instruction offered via computer and the Internet. In Glossary-of-Key-Terms of Digital Strategy, e-learning is defined as learning that is facilitated by the use of digital tools and

content. Typically, it involves some form of interactivity, which may include online interaction between the learner and their teacher or peers. Thus, e-learning is basically the use of computers and World Wide Web to facilitate learning.

The appeal of innovation in technology and electronic gadgets directed an educator to design an on-line approach to the teaching of writing skill. Here though partially related it is worthwhile to quote Anderson's theory that on-line learning, like all forms of quality learning, is "knowledge, community, assessment, and learner centered" (ibid: 55). As an on-line course designer and teacher, the writer learner has to choose, adapt, and perfect educational activities that maximize Web

affordances: these can be achieved effectively through feedback, assessment and reflection.

The on-line approach to the teaching of writing takes into account today's youth, especially those pursuing technical undergraduate courses, and their fascination with computer technology. The students plan and cooperate as a writing community to participate in writing and editing sessions. They apply creative writing techniques in as if in a writing workshop; learn skills in editing and criticism; are introduced to technical presentation skills; and learn the processes involved in writing and publication. The learning objective of students are satisfied once they start utilizing acquired theoretical knowledge and skills to produce original creative pieces; students compose creative texts by integrating computer and technological programs; they create as well create successful E-Methods in Literary Production churning out meaningful essays etc.

In Creating Writing pieces and multimedia presentations as well as designing a blog and producing an e-portfolio they channelize their

creative juices to the best of their potential. Programs, such as Microsoft Word, PageMaker, FrontPage, and communicative accesses such as the internet, intranet, e-chat and 'on-line' forums are utilized to facilitate their creative production.

Writing has always been taught in an approach that requires students to work individually and not as a community in a conservative classroom. But by applying technology and going on-line, these students benefit from the traditional workshop environment and, additionally, gain the advantages of computer technology. In an article, entitled *Toward a Theory of On-line Learning*, Anderson (2004: 37) claims: the Net provides expanded opportunities for students to plunge ever deeper into knowledge resources, thus affording a near limitless means for students to grow their knowledge, to find their way around the knowledge of the discipline, and to benefit from its expression in thousands of formats and contexts.

The Internet can be a source of creativity for students as ideas can come in many forms – surfing images, articles, videos, songs, and blogs – to name just a few. For learning to be active, it cannot happen in a content vacuum. The wealth of knowledge that the e-learning offers can be overwhelming: the Web offers students a rich source of raw materials. The online medium provides a unique environment for teaching and learning. Anderson (2004: 273) claims one of the most compelling features of this context is its "ability to support content encapsulated in many formats, including multimedia, video, and text, which gives access to learning content that exploits all media attributes."

The French Marxist theorist, Pierre Macherey (1978), who sees a writer not as a creator but a producer, has developed a model that looks at the correct literary form as a link between realist work and historical

reality and the relationship between the writer and his text. According to Macherey, the producer "works pre-existing literary genres, conventions, language and ideology into end-products: literary texts" (Jefferson & Robey, 1982: 177). Like the process of labour in the production line, where raw materials are first collected, then combined and finally transformed into an end-product, the role of the writer mirrors this process.

Burroway (2003: xxi) claims "all writing is imaginative" and that the "translation of experience or thought into words is of itself an imaginative process." The writing is also autobiographical as well as invented; clearly, this affirms that subjectivity of the writer in forms the writing. The first writing assignment of students is for them to compose an understanding of their traits, likes, dislikes etc. An analysis of the students' write up certainly exposes how the self becomes an inspiration to the writing process and production. According to Garrison and Anderson (2003: 2), "at the core of the e-learning transformation is the Internet."

The Web is certainly a rich resource for students to gather information on personal attributes appreciating a human being's image. The inherent features of the Internet include "its interactive dimensions that allow for control of the navigating information to be with the users" (Loo & Yeap, 1998 cited in Latiffah Pawanteh & Samsudin A. Rahim, 2001: 107). Hence, diverse forms of information are provided to users upon their request. The individual user dictates the terms of his or her own use of the Internet.

The community-centered nature of the writing process environment reveals the student's self-position as writer during the writing process. One's self-position as writer exposes one's subjectivity– the result of personal experiences, social expectations, formal training, research and readings – which influences one's writing. For instance, individual fancy, or dislike, or faith, or the dream they cherish etc is a recurring theme in the writings produced by the students. As an example, one student, who had a disliked going to multiplex to watch movie substantiated the reasons being heavy traffic, noise in the theater, parking problem, enticing junk food etc. as the reasons. In another instance, a loving parent becomes the raw material for another piece of narrative essay.

If they upload photos they write caption for each photo this also hones the learners' ability in conveying the message precisely. Many slideshows focused on the self, such as family, friends, hobbies and list

of favourite things. These became a reservoir and source of raw materials for their creative writing. An examination of the selection of pictures and the captions beneath can reveal the students' self-position as writers.

Anderson (2004: 42) claims the World Wide Web is "a multifaceted technology that provides a large set of communication and information management tools that can be harnessed for effective education provision." The ease with which content can be updated and revised, either manually, or the use of autonomous agent technology makes online learning content more responsive and current than content developed for other media (Anderson, 2004). The availability of blogs and user-friendly course-content management systems provides an environment in which teachers and learners can create and update course contents themselves. The aid of programmers and designers is no longer required. The students are autonomous learners. The autonomy is enhanced when they upload the creative pieces in their e-portfolio; this is a form of self-publishing. The Web has empowered the students into becoming writer-producers who no longer require the services of a traditional publisher. However, even though this empowerment offers openness and freedom, the ease of creation and revision can also lead to error and "less-than-professional-standard output" (ibid: 42).

Interestingly, at the end of the day in a play way, fun filled method they embrace learning. Weblogs is an avenue for anyone to post musings and record day-to-day happenings on-line (Jonathan Yang, 2006). The discourse is confessional in nature, and what is private and personal is made public by the technology that gives birth to it. The false-sense of 'anonymity' which students feel they have in cyber space allows them to be personal in their musings. Many of the students' earlier postings are about assignments for the course; this confession often reveals their thoughts and emotions on learning and education which if monitored by the teacher as a mentor can facilitate healthy discussion for the uprootment of false notions of the learners.

An e-learning approach to the teaching of writing is relatively novel concept opening up new vistas unexplored and untapped. The processes involved in the writing of essays, reviews using e-methods have shown that utilising computer technology and the internet complement rather than hamper the creativity of the students. Students are empowered by the autonomous nature of the Internet when they 'publish' their write ups and creative pieces by uploading them into their e-portfolios. The freedom of the Internet also opens the writing of the students to instant feedback from visitors to their weblogs. The Web certainly becomes a rich source of raw materials, which the students later transform into their creative pieces.

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