

# LEARNING ECOLOGY: YOUTUBING AND CONTENT CREATION

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## Abstract

YouTube is a popular website that hosts a huge collection of online videos which are used increasingly in and out of the classrooms by instructors and learners alike.. However, even though it is a free website, not many young people are involved in digital content creation. The authors will conduct a literature review and a case study to explore whether content creation leads to deep learning. It is hypothesised that deep learning does take place when learners are engaged in content creation.

Keywords: learning ecology, YouTube, content creation

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The current generation of students today is growing up in a world of ubiquitous technology and user-generated content. This 'YouTube google-eyed generation' approach learning in a new way. Thus the traditional behaviorist paradigm where knowledge is acquired by learners as a result of information being transferred down and through rote learning is no longer effective.

In the present day, student learning is not limited to the traditional instructional paradigm where learning only happens within the walls of the classroom and the library. The vehicle for learning itself has evolved from printed materials and lecture notes to PowerPoint slides to static and now flash driven animated websites in order to deliver content to students. According to Lievrouw (2006) technology has brought about these changes in behavior. This is also supported by Tan and Pearce (2011) who claim that use of technology such as videos not only engages students in their understanding of a topic, but also supports constructivist learning

Learning can be defined as "as a process of knowledge creation which concentrates on mediated processes where common objects of activity are developed collaboratively". (Paavola, Lipponen & Hakkarainen, 2002 pp. 2432)

According to Barr and Tagg (1995 p15) the main purpose of educational institutions should be to “create environments and experiences that enable students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, to make students members of communities of learners that make discoveries and solve problems”.

This is also supported by Brown (2002) who characterised learning ecology as

- Collection of overlapping communities of interest
- Cross-pollinating with each other and
- Constantly evolving and largely self-organizing.”

Lenhart et. al (2004) explained content creation as the creation of digital content for the purpose of self-expression or distribution. One learning ecology that supports content creation is YouTube, a free website providing opportunities for creating, uploading and sharing user-generated content (Snyder and Burke, 2008). The videos that are uploaded on YouTube are current and imaginatively presented. Very often viewers are able to drop comments on the contribution of others.

Both instructors and learners find YouTube videos effective in inspiring and engaging learning among young people. In order to promote active learning in the classroom, many instructors supplement their lectures with YouTube videos to stimulate discussions and engage students in learning. Learners too use videos from YouTube as a resource for information. Despite this, findings of other authors suggest that relatively few young people are taking advantage of the opportunity to create and distribute digital content,

To encourage students in digital content creation, instructors can issue learners with production assignments. Small groups of students will be able to collaborate together on the given problems sharing their views and findings with the other team members. This allows for a wider spectrum of views as well as self-direction of their learning and reflection on their findings.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY & RESULTS**

### ***Case Study***

A class of 32 first year college students was set a task to work in small groups of four and create a video that relates to a specific course topic (The Fetch Execute Cycle). They were then required to post the video generated on YouTube in 2 weeks' time. The case study demonstrates how learners working in small groups were able to share their findings with their team members, reflect on the results and self direct their learning.

## **Observation**

At the beginning of the first week, each group was questioned on their progress. They were unsure on what was required of them. They were then informed on how to go about researching on the subject topic, the need to assign each member in the group a task as well as a representative to create the video. By end of the first week, they were able to report on their progress with all the group members sharing their viewpoints. When any group member appeared confused, the other members of the group helped clarify any misunderstandings. However, there were some members in two groups who were quiet and did not seem to contribute. When they were then asked to report their progress, they turned and asked their other members what was going on. By week 2, most of the learners were able to provide situations where this can be applied. At the end of Week 2, every group had their video posted online.

## **3.0 CONCLUSION**

The case study does indicate that learning takes place among learners when they are involved in the creation of digital contents. They work in groups to acquire information as well as to collaborate with team members, which finally led to knowledge creation and the production of digital content. There is also evidence that not all members participated in group discussions in some groups. This may have been personal choice. To answer the question 'Does deep learning take place with content creation;' is difficult to quantify the benefits of content creation. However there is evidence from this study that students were able to direct and take responsibility for their own learning and of students digging deeper to find the required information.

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