Experiential Learning 2.0

Incorporating YouTube© in Leisure Studies

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Abstract

For decades, experiential learning has been a driving theory in leisure studies. However, students today are more digitally orientated, and professors need to evolve to more current technologies to effectively relate to the digital culture. This article describes how to combine the principles of experiential learning and information and communication technologies (ICT) through a digital video assignment. Students create their own content-focused video on a specific leisure service topic and post it online for classmates to learn from and interact with. The learning objectives, including becoming more familiar with technology, becoming more creative, developing critical thinking skills, and demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter were achieved through this assignment. Professors/instructors can modify this activity to meet their specific learning objectives. This experiential learning opportunity is recommended for both undergraduate and graduate students.

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For decades, showing videos has been an effective bridge between theoretical concepts and real-world situations in classroom settings. The practice has become so popular that O'Bannon and Goldenberg (2008) provided educators with a guide entitled *Teaching with movies: Recreation, Sports, Tourism, and Physical Education* that helps educators select commercially available videos to meet learning objectives. While we agree that showing videos is an excellent tool when processed correctly, it strays from our deep heritage in experiential education (Ford, 1986; Priest, 1986). Furthermore, today's students are different; Prensky calls them 'Digital Natives', with more than "10,000 hours [of] playing videogames, over 200,000 emails and instant messages sent and received; over 10,000 hours talking on digital cell phones; over 20,000 hours watching TV (a high percentage fast-speed MTV), over 500,000 commercials seen— all before the kids leave college" (Prenksy, 2001, p. 1). There is recent evidence that these trends are accelerating (Lewin, 2010). These 'Digital Natives' can benefit from traditional experiential learning activities. Professors, however, need to be able to speak the students' language and develop experiential activities that fit into the new digital culture (WGBH, 2010). These authors suggest creating, editing, and uploading digital videos.

The University of Florida offers an undergraduate course entitled LEI-3180 Current Trends in Leisure Services. This course focuses on critically analyzing the status of recreation and leisure, understanding recreation and leisure as a service area and as a social phenomena, and understanding the impact of leisure participation, service, and program delivery for future recreation and leisure professionals. Because the emphasis is on current and future trends, the instructor believed that class projects should encourage proficiency in current technologies as well. This evolved into an assignment of creating a two- to five-minute video on a future or current trend(s) in leisure studies and posting that content on YouTube©.

Theoretical Framework

Experiential education has a rich history. Depending on the definition, it can be traced back to the ancient Greeks: Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. John Dewey (1938) is credited as one of the modern founding theorist in experiential learning. More contemporary theorists such as Kurt Hahn (1970) developed the theory and practices of the Outward Bound schools, and Maria Montessori (1972) developed an entire pedagogy based on the experiences of her students. Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1969) commented on personal growth, group processes, and openness to new experiences within the field of experiential education. Lastly, Phyllis Ford (1986) and Simon Priest (1986) wrote specifically on experiential learning through leisure experiences such as camping and ropes courses.

However, for the purposes of this article, the authors will concentrate on experiential education as learning through completing an experience and then processing that experience. Slavin defined learning as, "a change in the individual

caused by experience" (1986, p. 104). The experience could be completing a low ropes course, camping, canoeing, or in this case a digital video assignment. The experiential learning pedagogy asserts that the participant learns by "walking the walk" and not just by learning to "talk the talk" (Gass, 1995, p. 104). In creating a digital video, the student must demonstrate critical thinking, proficiency with technology, some level of creativity, and an adequate understanding of the subject matter.

Media analysis in our field is not new; Cherum and Driver (1983), MacKay and Couldwell (2004) and Taylor et al. (1995), for example, analyzed photo images to better understand the experiences of visitors to destinations. However, technology continues to evolve at an amazing rate.

Since the introduction of ICT [information and communication technologies] in education, schools now face new social, cultural, and pedagogical phenomena, which challenge teachers in terms of their technical abilities, knowledge, and expertise, ICT creates new possibilities, dilemmas, and directions and encourages teachers to harness the new opportunities that ICT offers to make teaching and learning more meaningful and rewarding (Levin & Wadmany, 2008, p. 234).

Changes in technology, especially the interactive components of the Internet and Web 2.0 (websites like Facebook©, YouTube©, and other social networking sites) provide new teaching and learning possibilities (WGBH, 2010).

YouTube© was invented in 2005 and was purchased by Google in 2006 for $1.56 billon USD (Caplan 2006). To demonstrate its popularity, YouTube© exceeded "more than a million hours of original video" programming in just six months, something that NBC, ABC, and CBS took 60 years to achieve (Bull & Bell, 2009, p. 30). Although scholarly research is still scarce involving YouTube©, one can imagine its potential as an effective learning and teaching tool.

Description of Activity

Students were assigned the task of creating a two- to five-minute video on a current or future trend in leisure studies. The video was expected to be creative and no more risqué than PG-13 in content. Students were allowed to work solo or in groups of two on the assignment.

Making a movie using Windows Movie Maker© is a fairly simple process, and most Windows operating systems include this program in the basic packaged software on the majority computers (similarly there is Imovie© for Apple© computers). When students use Windows Movie Maker©, video files, still photographs, and music can be incorporated into a smoothly flowing, professional quality mini-movie. Windows Movie Maker© has three main areas: the task pane, timeline/storyboard area, and a preview screen. The task pane displays all available media files and organizes all of the different tools used to shape the video. The timeline/storyboard area is where media is 'dragged' to create the video. The preview screen allows students to review what they have created.

The first step in creating a video is to import all of the music, pictures, and video used to make the movie. Windows Movie Maker© has a very simple import function. Students browse and select the desired media files (i.e. pictures, video, or music/audio), which automatically show up in the task pane.

The next step in creating a movie is to drag each file into the timeline/storyboard area. This area of the screen has two different views: storyboard or timeline where the student can toggle back and forth as needed. The storyboard view of the timeline/storyboard area is most useful in organizing the sequence of photos or video used to create the movie and allows the student to make sure the sequence of visual material is correct and flows well from one scene or picture to the next. The timeline view of the timeline/storyboard area features a second by second timeline and allows the director to add music and adjust the length of time that still photos are displayed or how long transitions between scenes or pictures occur.

Besides showing media that can be used to create the movie, the task pane contains tools for editing and publishing the movie. In this area of the screen students can add a title screen and credits, text to still pictures or video, transitions between scenes, special effects to video and still photos, and make sure audio and video line up. Once they have created their movie students can review what they have created using the preview screen.

Most students will be able to make a very sophisticated video through experimenting with Windows Movie Maker©. If students have difficulties with any step of the process, they have a help function resource on the upper tool bar containing excellent tutorials and detailed, step-by-step descriptions of any particular function. If students use Apple© computers instead of Windows, Imovie© has a similar click-and-drag interface with built-in tutorials and is just as easy to use as Windows Movie Maker©.

Once students have created a movie, publishing it online is a simple process on Facebook©, YouTube©, Flickr©, Itunes©, other Web 2.0 sites. Many students will have previously posted pictures or text on these websites and should be able to post video just as easily.

Outcomes and Recommendations

The outcomes of the assignment were very positive. The individual students and groups of two presented their videos to the class on a projected screen and then processed the experience through group discussions and instructor-led debriefings of the videos. In larger classes, the amount of time for presenting and discussing videos may be limited. However, one advantage of using a web-based system such a YouTube©, is that it allows the students the flexibility of watching the videos anywhere, anytime (perhaps as a homework assignment) and being able to discuss them online with classmates, asynchronously, with the same flexibility. Processing is an essential component in experiential education. Therefore, one cannot assume that learning is an "automatic result, [thus], synthesis and reflection [is needed to] enhance the internalization" of the students' learning (Priest & Gass, 1997, p. 137).

The videos ranged from very creative to replications of videos the instructor presented as examples. A few of the more creative videos borrowed themes from popular television programming and the news. Some of the videos posted included trends in outer space tourism, Wii© fitness, and online social networking.

The learning objectives including becoming more familiar with technology, becoming more creative, developing critical thinking skills, and demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter were achieved through this assignment.

However, each instructor can implement their own rubric to address specific learning objectives. This activity is recommended for undergraduate and graduate students. The skills developed in this exercise also provide students with an accomplishment to add to their resumes and quite possibly advertise a skill that may appeal to agencies seeking to enhance their online content.

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