

<http://helpp.hull-college.ac.uk/uploads/report/interviews/elgg-part1.mp3>

Health and Science Route Tutor

Q So how did you set up your ELGG in your particular area?

A Right, my area is the Health and Science route for the HE programmes so we've got quite a few courses within that route so I initially set it up for me to have my own space but to allow students to have a community based on each course. Now in the early stages that seemed like a really good idea but actually that separated them too widely so we've amended that slightly so we now have a single community for the whole of the Health and Science route that all students within that route contribute to and join into and it creates a wider sense of community amongst the courses, there's students from different courses talking to each other now. All students were asked to set up their own profiles and start reflecting and they're also encouraged to look at the blog entries to look at current issues that are going on within the sectors that they're working in and consider aspects that myself and other students have posted and contribute to those discussion threads.

Q I notice you actually used a sort of discussion board, did you find that effective?

A Yes I did, it's taken us a while, we're all novices on ELGG, it's taken us a while to really get to grips with where the reflective blog is, where the discussion boards are, where the community blog is and which forum lends itself well to a particular discussion or a particular aspect of their studies, so now we're a bit more practised at that we've found the discussion boards and the blogging area is the main bit of the community is used much more widely now than it was initially, people were blogging, doing their own things in their own profiles and not coming into the community as much.

Q What sort of age range are your students?

A The youngest are probably early 20s, they're all mature learners, we have students in their fifties, I don't think we've got any older than that.

Q Did you find any difference between what might be regarded as the social networking generation and the older students?

A Yes, I expected the older students to be a little more intimidated by the concept and actually that's been partially justified, some of the older students are still reluctant to use it and engage with it, they'll still complete their reflections on paper and if really pushed will then put those reflections on ELGG but they're not less familiar with it. For the younger students I assumed being familiar with social networking would support them in using ELGG and they certainly were able to navigate round much more quickly than the other students however some students were expecting a format similar to something like Facebook or Bebo that was more socially based rather than something educationally based and they were expecting to do things that maybe were less appropriate for the format that ELGG has offered but they seem to be using it and they're getting more confident now with what it is and why it's there.

Q Do you think you'll carry on using it?

A Yes I do actually, it's actually much more time consuming than I thought it was going to be. By the time I've gone in and looked at it... at the moment I've got in the region of 50 students so I don't blog with each of them on a regular basis but I try to get a look at their reflective journal when they've shared it, to put a comment on each one of those individually is very, very time consuming. Posting a blog on the community blog is equally, you know, thinking of a subject, looking out for subjects to put on there is quite time-consuming however it's been more time consuming because we've been learning as we've gone along and students are less familiar, students have needed an awful lot of encouragement and support. Next year I will be more familiar, we will already have a year group who are familiar and confident and engaged with it so we will be able to bring in the new students more quickly but also now that we're familiar with the basics I think that there's opportunities there to roll it out into portfolio stuff and I think there's an opportunity potentially to give, to ask students to submit work for assignments for instance on ELGG. Many assignments require a reflective journal to be kept so those journals are already on ELGG. You know if we can set up those systems to enable us to mark reflections in that forum then it could become a very formal part of their studies and increase user engagement as well, learner engagement with it.

Q Do you find that you've sort of used both the paper-based and the digital-based situations at the moment, do you think you've maybe dropped some of the paperwork, do you think that will disappear?

A Inevitably where students haven't engaged with ELGG and are reticent to engage with that they will do it in a paper-based version and we're encouraging them not to do that up to now we've not been able to say it's compulsory, you know, for instance we've got dyslexic students who were, at first, very wary of that format and we also had a student with a significant visual impairment and who was obviously going to find that difficult but having said that those initial concerns didn't follow through, our dyslexic students are actually blogging very well with each other and they're engaging really well with it. Our student with visual impairment we were able to set up zoom text and things like that that support facilities on a computer for him so he was able to access it. So next year I think there will be a stronger need for them to access it as a compulsory part of their studies in which the rates and use of it will increase and the community will expand and it will be self-perpetuating hopefully.

Q Have you had any other student feedback about it?

A Some of it is excellent. I think you've got a couple of students coming in to see you tomorrow and they enjoy it and actually communicate with each other very well. Others are less confident and less familiar with it and it's more about confidence. In the early stages if they post something and nobody reflects or adds a discussion thread and contributes to that then they can become disillusioned fairly quickly and as I've already said you know it's quite time consuming to get round everyone so if that hasn't been there they can say well I put something up but no-one replied to me. Again, that workload will reduce as there's more people.

Q On your paper-based system would you normally see everything each week?

A No. In the early stage although one of the ways I've sold it is that students will be required to keep a reflective journal and that when their assignments come in they will take an element from practice and put that into their assignment. One of the selling points I've used is that if they're

posting their reflections as they go along then I can support them, saying oh there's an opportunity here to link to such and such a theorist or have you considered looking at this piece of legislation which underpins that part of your practice, that's a really good point, have you thought about making links to this element of your practice or this part of context, have you seen this part of research that enables them to really expand their ideas to a state that they can take forward to their assignments in a much more rounded way from a range of viewpoints and some students have seen the value of that early on and engaged with it quite well and other students have and that's been seen in their assignments when they come in. Having said that, all students whether they reflect on ELGG or they reflect in a paper journal submit their journal in a printout at the back in their appendices of their assignments so at the moment it's a duplication but we'd like to move towards it being a one only. So if we have an effective community where students are effectively engaged and talking and blogging with each other and contributing to discussion threads that are on the community blog then it means there's an opportunity there for cross-fertilisation of ideas between student groups that theory, practice, legislation that applies to one professional setting is carried forward to another and students learn from each other which is essentially how HE students should learn or should be a component of their learning which isn't there quite yet but hopefully in the months and years to come that will be in place and will provide a forum for that to be in place.