

### **Teaching & Technology in Media Studies**

“Instigating a Cultural Shift: Reconfiguring the Role of College Students in Online Learning and Program Design”

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At the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), a faculty member created a new LMS intended for creative courses that enabled students and faculty to upload, share, and watch various types of media files. The LMS was first introduced in a sample of CalArts courses for beta testing. The college students initially felt hesitant to interact with it for several reasons, the most notable one being that it was still in beta mode, with several bugs to work out. The other main concern was that faculty used it as a supplemental platform or optional tool that engendered low levels of class participation.

To better embed the LMS into a participatory culture at CalArts, the Community Arts Partnership (CAP) tried to reconfigure the college students' relationship with the LMS by enabling them to integrate it into their own courses (Jenkins et al 2009). The intention was that college students could spearhead solutions for turning the platform into a fundamental part of learning culture. CAP led the charge by linking the LMS to a pilot course for high school youth taught by college students. CAP is a co-curricular program that offers free, after-school and school-based arts programs in Los Angeles. CAP's main goal is twofold: (1) provide underserved youth with free, high quality, rigorous arts education and (2) help CalArts students become culturally responsive professionals and educators by facilitating the connection of artistic practices to community engagement.

The pilot course, Cinema Arts Blended Learning Education (CABLE) Program was designed to utilize in-person weekly practicums and LMS to equip youth with the knowledge and skills to produce a web-series from conception to projection. Web series, as an episodic media form, obliges participants to collaborate on one unifying product and enables them to hone individual skills and leadership competencies in separate necessary disciplines. The course was taught by CalArts college students from multiple disciplines (Acting, Cinematography, Graphic Design, Directing and Creative Writing). Two lead filmmaking alumni facilitated the workshops for all youth participants but each college student was in charge of teaching his/her discipline specialty to 3-8 youth participants, setting up his/her own LMS platform and in-person curriculum.

This model empowers the college students to be experts in their particular field and thus teach in a manner that is intuitive to them as learners of that discipline. For example, online video tutorials and quizzes for testing the participants knowledge of important terminology worked well for Cinematography, because of the technical information required to productively use equipment on set. The creative writers used the forums as a virtual writers' room, brainstorming and providing feedback on scripts while the actors uploaded clips and links for analysis of performances. The multi-disciplinary project made it more conducive to integrating the LMS into the course because it enabled different learning tools to be utilized based on the discipline and preferred learning style of the instructor.

The college students were able to approach the platform usage as *instructors* and *students*, thus they were cognizant of creating connected learning spaces to entice youth participant usage. For example, once shooting commenced the instructors would post dailies to the LMS for the youth participants to review their collaborative work so the in-person practicums could be primarily used for hands-on learning. Students were motivated to see their work immediately and continue the dialogue about the course between in-person meetings.

A cycle was created in which the youth's interest in using the platform motivated college students to communicate virtually and curate more content. When the youth participants were interviewed about the LMS, most agreed that they preferred this site to their in-school online learning platforms. The participants approached it less like homework because of the site's capacity to host video files and provide access to the college students outside of the classroom. The content intrinsically felt cooler to the youth because the interest-driven subject matter was designed and procured by college students (Peppler 2013). The youth participants' open-mindedness and excitement about the platform helped the college students reevaluate the LMS in a fresh way.

The LMS proved necessary to the success of to the pilot program. It enhanced the role of the college students as course designers, gave them more agency in the participants' learning outcomes and expanded mentorship opportunities, but it's too soon to determine the pilot's impact on campus culture. For this roundtable we would like to use this pilot as a basis to raise the following questions about the potentialities of LMS: 1) how can it enable student agency; 2) how can it alter the role of the student; 3) how can it facilitate student mentorship; 4) how important is it to integrate the LMS into the design of the curricular framework (versus using it as a supplemental tool); and 5) are certain subjects more conducive to integrating LMS into course design?

Jenkins, H., Purushotma R., Weigel M., Clinton, K., & Robison, A.J. (2009). *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Peppler, Kylie (2013) *New Opportunities for Interest-Driven Arts Learning in a Digital Age*. Washington, DC: The Wallace Foundation.