Chapter 4

Embracing the shift: Edupunk, Teaching Naked, Social Media and making it all work in the classroom

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Access to information is changing—as a result, learning is changing. Social media tools are pressuring the privileged learning spaces of higher education by democratizing knowledge and putting power in the hands of the individual. Our students can now acquire knowledge on their own and under their own terms. They live in a world where access to information has changed everything. As educators, if we do not recognize this shift and adapt, we will be left behind!

Technology changes students' modes of thought and their ways of learning. Students today navigate between multiple technologies. Wikis, Facebook™, Delicious™, Twitter™, Flickr™, YouTube™ are some of the tools that are changing how our students learn, the way they network with each other, and the way they share information. Clearly tools like these are changing the playing field for educators. If we are not careful, tools like these could replace us as educators. To understand the shift that is taking place, we must assess higher education's role in today's digital society, what web 2.0 tools and social media have to offer as a way of accessing knowledge, and how we as educators are needed as navigators and mentors in this new world. In the following pages, I describe how I have embraced this shift and tried to make it work in my classroom.

Edupunk

Perhaps the best place to begin is "Edupunk." "Edupunk"—a term coined by educator Jim Groom—is simply a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) attitude toward education that aims to avoid mainstream tools (e.g., PowerPoint and Blackboard) opting instead for a "student-centered, resourceful, teacher or community-created rather than corporate-sourced, democratic and progressive" approach to education (Madsen-Brooks, 2008). According to Norman (2008), Edupunk is

> "about a culture, a way of thinking, a philosophy. It's about DIY. Lego is edupunk. Chalk is edupunk. A bunch of kids exploring a junkyard is edupunk. A kid dismantling a CD player to see what makes it tick is edupunk." (Norman, 2008)

In other words, Edupunk is hands-on learning that begins with the learner's interest and makes them relevant to today's digital culture by using the very tools of that culture. Edupunk embraces the tools and culture already in use by students to augment the classroom experience but also establish the role of the teacher as a guide and mentor for students throughout their educational experience.

The Amped Classroom: Edupunking the DAC

I teach in the Digital Animation Center (DAC) where we educate artists that are on the bleeding edge of using technology in their creative practice. And while I consider myself a power user and early adopter of technology, all of the students in the DAC are power users. As power users, they have access to the very same ocean of knowledge

their faculty in the DAC use to prepare for class. So the obvious question is, if our students have access to the same knowledge as their instructors, then why are we there?

The old paradigm for teaching was the result of the scarcity of, or lack of, access to knowledge. The teacher therefore played a central role as the gatekeeper of knowledge. But access to knowledge has fundamentally changed. This radical shift in who, when, and how, knowledge is accessed, forces us as educators to think/rethink how we embrace technology in our teaching practice.

One way we have tried to embrace this change in the DAC is in our DAC capstone experience. Films, particularly animated films, are complex. They require a small army of artists with very specific skills working together. As a result, we intentionally mimic the collaborative workspace of the film industry by relying heavily on collaboration in our coursework. Our curriculum culminates with a three semester capstone series of courses in which the entire senior class forms an in-house studio and creates a high-production value short film as a collaborative, creative team. Social media technology and its ability to connect the students (and to a lesser degree the instructors) has proven to be a fulcrum with which our students effectively collaborate with each other to create a short film. Through utilizing social media, we have tried to embrace a student first edupunk perspective in our courses.

Teaching Naked: When Pretty Slides Aren't Enough

But utilizing social media and having students collaborate with each other doesn't really address the important role instructors can and should play in 21st century classrooms. In the DAC, we strongly believe in the role of the instructor but as mentioned earlier, we think that the role of the instructor needs to change. One way we have been trying to change the role of the instructor is by "Teaching Naked" whenever we can.

"Teaching Naked," first coined by José A. Bowen, is the simple idea to "unplug the classroom" and eliminate one's over-reliance on technology. Bowen, like many others, worries that professors are spending way too much in-class time on technologies like PowerPoint (which he calls "the absolute worst form of technology for the classroom") when they should instead be using class time in more productive ways. Now Bowen is not advocating for completely eliminating technology altogether, but rather using it differently. In his case, this involves simply moving it out of the classroom.

Sound strange? Well, Bowen is quite edupunk in his approach, using podcast and video games regularly in his teaching practice. Bowen is not "anti-technology" he is just against the way it is currently used in most classrooms. His approach is thoroughly technological. In fact the approach is a really smart one; by using technology he is able to deliver the "lecture" material outside of class time, and save the in-class time for discussion and participation.

Faculty in the DAC have tried to follow Bowen's approach by simply moving the didactic content of our courses to currently familiar, accessible media, using familiar, everyday tools (e.g., wiki's, blogs, YouTube, Vimeo, Delicious, Twitter) that students can access outside of class. By doing so, students are able to consume the course content on their own terms, at a time of their choosing, with tools they use every day, and ultimately be better prepared *before* class. This approach changes what an instructor can do with class time.

Social Media Technologies used at the DAC

In my own teaching practice, I employ a number of technologies. But a small handful have risen to the top simply because they work well with my students. These include wikis, Skype screencasts, discussion forums, and social media like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

Wiki

A wiki is an easy to use web technology that enables users to collaboratively construct and edit a website without special software or tools other than a web browser. The term wiki is Hawaiian for "quick" and was coined as a name for a particular type of website that allows visitors to easily contribute to and edit the website. Wiki systems are particularly suited for collaborative group authoring of documents and websites. The most famous example of a wiki is Wikipedia, a very extensive online encyclopedia that allows anyone to add to and edit its entries. In the DAC we use four forms of wikis:

1. Wikis authored solely by faculty.
2. Wikis primarily authored by students.
3. Wikis authored and used by staff and students as equals.
4. Wikis publicly available and created by others.

In the courses I teach, I embed wikis into my Blackboard course shell as a way to both deliver "off classroom" content (i.e., a wiki authored solely by faculty) in the spirit of teaching naked as well as a tool for students to cluster around a given subject or task in a more collaborative learning space (i.e., wikis primarily authored by students). Using wikis this way has been particularly useful in augmenting the classroom experience by allowing students to explore the course content in depth and to be prepared for more substantive face-to-face work in class. I often will combine wikis with other technologies. For instance, I often include a class specific YouTube channel in which I have gathered clips that teach a given concept in filmmaking or animation. The tool provides a particularly powerful learning space that allows students the freedom to access the content on their own time and on their own terms. In this specific example, students are then required to take a short, simple low-stakes quiz in Blackboard, which deals with the content of the wiki. This test insures that they have read through and watched the posted content prior to class time.

Skype

Skype, a Voice Over Internet (VOIP) tool, is another technology I (as well as other faculty at the DAC) use to connect the classroom with professional artists through informal video conferences. These video conferences are as easy to set up as a phone call and provide a connection to artists working in a studio or on location anywhere in the world (provided they have Internet access). These informal, often freeform discussions let the students find out what is going on in the industry, ask questions relative to that class and give them a chance to see, in some cases, life on the inside. This sort of forum helps DAC students make connections between theory and practice (between the classroom and the professional studio) as well as begin to take part in the larger community of practice.

Screencasts

In addition to Skype and wikis, I also use screencasting technologies to compliment face-to-face instruction. My students—particularly the "visual" learners—

love video tutorials. Video tutorials are a popular way of delivering content on specific tools or techniques in animation. The use of screen capture technologies to share information is ubiquitous within the animation industry. Rather than fighting the trend, faculty in the DAC regularly capture lectures and make them available to our students. Because of the complexity of what we teach, often the instructor will deliver the lecture in class and provide a video/podcast of the same lecture. The thought here is that even though the lecture is still delivered in class, it is often an abbreviated, quicker lecture saving the more detailed and technique specific lecture for the video/podcast.

For the DAC student, the podcast assets are a bonus. They are seen as a value-added component of the class, a sort of take away, that does not replace the professor, face-to-face discussions or the lecture, but gives them the opportunity to relive the experience again on their own time and on their own terms.

Social Media

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, social media technologies like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are used throughout the DAC capstone experience to help students collaborate with each other. But these social media tools also help students connect with people they might never have a chance to meet face-to-face in the larger professional community. These tools are widely used in the real world and particularly within the animation and filmmaking industries, to promote artists' video resume/portfolio or "reel". Therefore, in our field leveraging these tools for formal learning outcomes makes sense. We have also used these tools to help students connect with industry insiders. These connections have helped DAC students gain an insider's perspective on what they are learning in class helping to better align the classroom and the real world. This makes courses more connected and more professionally relevant.

Blogging

Blogs or more specifically blogging is a simple method for connecting the classroom with your ideas, lectures, and musings. While arguments may rage over the precise definition of blogging, a blog is in essence an online diary style website. Short articles are posted in chronological order, with the most recent one at the top of the page. Simple software enables writers to fill in a form, press a button and update their website, producing quick and easy publishing on the web without the need for technical skills. The following are just some of the ways you can use blogging for teaching and learning:

- Replacing standard class web pages
- Professor-written blogs which cover interesting developments that relate to the theme of the course
- Organization of in-class discussion
- Organization of intensive seminars where students have to provide weekly summaries of the readings
- Requiring students to write their own blogs as part of their grade

Conclusion

The edupunked, teach naked, and blended learning approach to education used at the DAC works. It fosters the creative opportunities that lie at the interface between virtual and physical worlds. It has built a solid DAC-centric learning community. It embraces access to knowledge communities, experts and personalities outside of the

institution, stressing the importance for students to connect with networks of experts, and to the professional knowledge resources they are hungry for. It gives the DAC student a 24/7, global access to content, methods and ideas directly related to what is happening in the classroom and new knowledge that augments the course material. Finally, it gives everyone a voice, promoting the two-way communications so critical to success in a collaborative, creative workspace. While everything we do in the DAC might not work for every discipline, I am convinced that many individual aspects could be successfully incorporated into nearly every degree program. I hope every faculty member can find a way to successfully navigate the shift that is taking place in higher education the way we have in the DAC.

References

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Bio

Howard Cook is a trained studio artist with graduate degrees in painting and Digital Cinema. Cook has been working with digital content creation since its inception. He began his career as a photorealist painter and became one of the country's leading space/aerospace artists. Working directly with the crews of 12 shuttle missions, Howard helped to develop some of the first Educational/Public outreach programs for the NASA Shuttle program. Howard has worked as a production designer and Art Director for Paramount studios and Lucas films working on a broad range of products for film and television. He was the co-author, illustrator, and designer for the Simon and Schuster's publication, *Designs on Space: Blueprints for 21st Century Space Technology.*

In 1997, Cook became the Chief Technologist at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS). During his tenure, he was responsible for the development of new technologies and media tools for use in the museums award winning exhibits. He also led the design and creation of the new Gates Planetarium.

Since leaving DMNS in 2003, Howard has been consulting, focusing on development and design of marketing, Educational and Public Outreach Programs (E/PO), dynamic media, and experiences development. He joined the faculty of the University of Colorado College of Arts and Media in January of 2005 where he is currently the Area Head for the Digital Animation Center. Howard is also a member of the Board of Advisors for the National Space Science Technology Institute in Colorado Springs.