

Socratic learners or digital bankers?

Students and assessment in the 21st century

Robbie Smyth
Griffith College Dublin
Robbie.smyth@gcd.ie

Introduction

It is hard to find within the education community anyone who favours the banking concept of education as an acceptable method of teaching. Yet the teaching methodology so aptly characterised by Dickens in the 19th Century and Pink Floyd in the 20th still pervades the educational system. Classes are structured in neat rows often with tiered seating in the classic method, sacrificing little to style and all to cheap functionality. The students face the lecturer, white board, OHP or film screen passively awaiting instruction. They also now wait for outlines, readings, online resources and assignment titles while academic educational research suggests that many learners are focusing on the bare minimum effort needed to pass the module.

Contemporary educational practice focuses on developing the students' skills, promoting critical thinking, problem solving and student centred learning, but in practice day to day teaching involves crowd control, cabaret teaching and the challenge of disinterested and disenfranchised students.

This paper

This paper touches in a small way on these issues. It discusses an attempt to use the course requirements of assignment completion as a means to avoid the banking concept of education and adapt the assignment process as a means to promote critical thinking by using the new ICT technologies that permeate society today in a positive way to enhance learning for the student and the lecturer. It is an attempt to use the assignment process as a form of blended learning as defined by Bliuc et al (2007) and constructivism as defined by Rovai (2004). Blicu et al, define blended learning as “the thoughtful integration of classroom face to face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (Bliuc Et al, 2007, 233). Rovai defines constructivism as “a

philosophy of learning based on the premise that knowledge is constructed by the individual through his or her interactions with the environment” (Rovai, 2004, 80).

Background to Study

Traditionally, teaching a module in third level begins with an introductory lecture, and distribution of course outline, reading lists and possibly an assignment title. Assignments are useful because they meet a range of learning outcomes. The student has to learn time and project management skills, breaking the assignment into a series of milestones and tasks such as, the structuring their preparation time, initiating some research, going through the readings, creating a first draft, redrafting and finally submitting. In the context of attempting an academic essay, they might have to demonstrate critical thinking and theoretical understanding which are critical skills and learning outcomes that are required across many disciplines.

At third level there is an implicit assumption that the student has learned the time and project management skills needed for third level in their previous 14 years of schooling, but the anecdotal evidence of assignment work submitted would suggest an absence of consistency in assignment skill levels among students.

This study investigates a way to engage with the student and bypass the last minute preparation by setting an earlier hurdle that would also trigger the student to start preparing for the work earlier and developing deeper learning approaches to the assignment work.

The changing student environment

Perhaps the most critical factor in third level education today is the sheer scale of change in the learning environment and wider society. Recent studies give us a snapshot of the transforming student environment. An iReach study of 800 home internet users published in February 2008 for the Internet Advisory Board found that 70 per cent of young Irish teenagers, aged 14 to 17, use social networking sites, while just 14 per cent use the internet for accessing news and current affairs information.

Next to social networks the teenagers used the internet for school research – 54 per cent, random surfing – 53 per cent, email – 52 per cent, games – 47 per cent. (Irish Times 2008). The Programme for International Student Evaluation (PISA) surveyed 4,500 Irish secondary school students in 2007 found that the average Irish teenager

has more mobile phones, TVs and DVD players than their OECD counterparts. The OECD-PISA report found that calculators, educational software and internet access were more common in Ireland than the norm in other OECD states. They also found that literature, poetry, a desk and a quiet place to study were less common in Irish homes than the OECD norm (Eivers, 2007, 27).

In Britain the *Read up, Fed Up* reading survey commissioned by the Literacy Trust found that celebrity culture magazines were top of children's reading lists while least favourite reading material was long books (over 100 pages), homework related reading and Shakespeare in particular. The survey of 1,340 children between 11 and 14 were asked to rank their ten most and least favourite things to read. In the top ten favourites were *Heat* and *Bliss* magazine, computer game cheats on line, personal blogs, Harry Potter, Anne Frank's diary, the BBC online and books by T S Elliott, Louise Rennison and Anthony Horowitz.

The modern student lives in a world with CDs, mobile phones, PCs, the internet, social networking, MP3 players and 24 hour multi channel TV. Add in part-time jobs, a growing economy and relatively cheap air travel and you can have a crowded life. OTX a US research firm has conducted a survey of 3,000 people asking about multi-tasking behaviour. They found that the most intense period of multi-tasking is the evening, when people increasingly tend to media stack using TV, texting and email concurrently. The study co-authored by Dr Patrick Moriarty found that, "the tasks carried out by participants in their study would have taken 31 hours using the primitive email systems of 10 years ago" (Harlow 2008).

Ofcom, the British communication regulator's annual report on the British Communication Market gives other valuable data on the multimedia world that characterises society today. Ofcom found that 75 per cent of "20 to 34 year olds regularly use their mobile when in front of the TV, while more than a third of 25 to 44 year olds often check the internet at the same time as watching TV" (Wray 2008). The most important reasons for going online for the 15 to 24 age group in Britain was playing games on line – 52 per cent, downloading music files, video or movie clips – 50 per cent (Ofcom, 2008 65). An OTX Research study released in June 2008 of 13 to 17 year olds echoed some of the Ofcom findings, it found that US teens are spending an average of 1.5 hours online weekly (OTX, 2008).

Motoko Rich writing in the *New York Times* reports on a growing debate in the USA over the value of reading online and the impact that the internet and associated new media is having on teenagers. He also highlights a division between the USA and other OECD states concerning the next round of PISA testing (Rich 2008). In 2009 the OECD will introduce an electronic reading component to their maths, literacy and science tests, but in the USA there will be no such test for internet reading.

The need for such a test is highlighted by a relatively new iSkills digital literacy test administered by the Educational Testing Service, who oversee the SAT tests in the USA. Rich writes how “80 colleges and a handful of high schools have administered the test so far” and “of the more than 20,000 students who have taken the iSkills test since 2006, only 39 per cent of four-year college freshmen achieved a score that represented “core functional levels” in Internet Literacy” (Rich 2008).

Taking these findings with those of the Internet Advisory Board, Ofcom, the British Literacy Trust and OTX research it clearly shows a student body migrating from book to web based reading. A 2005 study commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation in the USA of 2,032 8 to 18 year olds provides more insight into this changing child’s world. They found that children pack the equivalent of 8.33 hours of media content a day into 6.5 hours of actual time, and this 6.5 hours compares to an average of 2.17 hours spent with parents and 1.5 hours of physical activity (Rideout et al, 2005, 6).

On a typical day in 2004, 81 per cent of 8 to 18 year olds watched TV, 54 per cent used a computer, 47 per cent going on line, 47 per cent read a magazine, 46 per cent read a book, while 34 per cent read a newspaper (Rideout et al, 2005, 6). In terms of time in an average day 6 minutes was spent on newspapers, compared to 3 hours plus TV, and in-between was 48 minutes spent online, 23 minutes reading a book and 14 minutes reading a magazine (Rideout et al, 2005, 6).

It is data like this that prompted Nicholas Carr to ask “Is Google making us stupid” in *Atlantic Monthly* magazine (Carr, 2008). Carr writes that, “The Internet promises to have particularly far-reaching effects on cognition”. Rich cites the value of reading from the viewpoint of Dana Gioia of the National Endowment for the Arts. Gioia argues that the decline in reading means “What we are losing in this country and presumably around the world is the focused, linear attention developed by reading” (Rich 2008).

All of these influences change by necessity how the student learns and by corollary should affect how we engage with their learning processes. Where once third level students were expected to browse and study for long hours in college libraries, today we require them to browse the library, internet and college intranet. So how do we help the student learn today. The data discussed shows that students are more than familiar with the internet, but the ETS iSkills test shows that familiarity with the technology does not guarantee that the newly gained ICT abilities are leading to what Rich describes as proof of the “cognitively demanding” skills of being able to locate “information quickly and accurately, corroborating findings on multiple sites” (Rich 2008) The iSkills assessment “measures the range of cognitive and non-cognitive ICT literacy skills aligned with nationally recognized Association of Colleges and Research Libraries (ACRL) standards” and assesses the “students' ability to navigate, critically evaluate and make sense of the wealth of information available through digital technology” (Educational Training Services 2008).

Many students use the internet to find out things but not in a structured, methodical way, but it does mean they have PCs and internet connections and some experience of web use such as how to cut and paste! Using the internet means that a student could study anytime, late at night or weekends as many have part-time jobs and work and study outside a simple nine to five format and it is this ease of access that prompted the assignment strategy used in the study.

How students approach study

So how do students approach their studies in the 21st century? They can text, listen to mp3 players, read the free papers available on campus, browse the readings handed out in class. But the majority no longer take notes. They might be 21st century Socratic students, where verbal communication exists alongside the digital world of texting, emails and blogs, but note taking in class is increasingly rare, and unlike the followers of Socrates they will not willingly participate in the Q&A learning methods his students did.

However, though students are not taking notes in class, it does not mean they have abandoned writing; rather the opposite is the case. The Pew Internet and American Life Project study published earlier this year in partnership with the National

Commission on Writing in the USA offers a fascinating insight into the writing world of the US teen. The survey of 700 children and their parents found that 85 per cent of teens engaged in some form of electronic communication, including texting, email and social networking but 60 per cent of those surveyed did not see this electronic communication as writing. 86 per cent of teens believe that good writing is important to success in life, with 56 per cent agreeing that it was essential.

In terms of academic writing, the focus groups conducted in conjunction with the phone survey found that they are more motivated when: (1) They can select topics that are relevant to their lives; (2) They get detailed feed back; (3) The idea that they are writing for an audience (Pew, 2008).

The idea of a hidden curriculum has been raised by many authors (Thomson & Falchikov, 1998); (Sambell & McDowell, 1998, 392). Thomson and Falchikov argue that “for every teacher’s curriculum there is a more powerful student hidden curriculum” and their study looks at the role of assessment in the learning process, student time management and intellectual development over time (Thomson & Falchikov, 1998, 380-381).

Thomson and Falchikov conclude that “In all the interviews it is clear that students are poor at time management and preparation of assignments until the date they are due in” and described this as a “self-induced overload” (Thomson & Falchikov, 1998, 383). The two also noted that many first year students, which are the cohort in my study, are at “early stages of intellectual development”, are “teacher centred” rating “the acquisition of information as of primary importance”, so the printed notes and handouts are vital (Thomson & Falchikov, 1998, 383).

In their conclusion Thomson and Falchikov write that “many students reported using a superficial approach towards their assessments” and would prefer assignments that “require a level of critical analysis and synthesis rather than rewarding memorisation” (Thomson & Falchikov, 1998, 389). Also important were their findings in relation to time, they note that students knew they would be better off if they started assignments early but “they simply did not do it or know how to do it” (Thomson & Falchikov, 1998, 389).

Sambell and McDowell also focus on the idea of a hidden curriculum, their research analysed 13 cases studies of “innovative assessment in practice” in British universities (Sambell & McDowell, 1998, 391). They define the hidden curriculum as the

distinction between “what is meant to happen” and “what teachers and learners actually do and experience” (Sambell & McDowell, 1998, 392).

Their analysis highlights issues such as a student’s “prior educational experiences” and cites the work of Boud (1995) who asserts that “assessment messages are coded, not easily understood and are often read differently and with different emphases by staff and by students” (Boud, 1995, 39).

However technical understanding of the *how* of successful assignment completion is just one issue, there is also the question of the student’s overall approach to learning which might be affected by the year of study (are they in first or final year), the module being taken, the perception of the academic environment and the actual lecturer for a particular subject.

Struyven, Dochy and Janssens (2005) identify three approaches to learning adopted by students in their review of student perceptions about assignments. They are surface approaches, deep approaches and an achieving approach. (Struyven, et al, 2005, 326-327).

Struyren et al define an achieving approach as where “the student’s intention was to achieve the highest possible grades by using well-organized and conscientious study methods and effective time management” (Struyven, et al, 2005, 327). They cite the work of Entwistle and Ramsden (1983) and Entwistle et al (2001) as the sources for characterising the learning approaches of students they identified.

A 1990 paper by Entwistle and Tait offers a clear summary of Entwistle’s theoretical work on student learning approaches. In the paper they report on two studies which “explore the relationships between approaches to learning, or study orientations, and perceptions of the academic environment” (Entwistle & Tait, 1990, 169). Entwistle and Tait revisit what is then over 15 years of student questionnaire based research on course perceptions and approaches to studying. In this paper they focus on two studies, one of first year engineering students in Scotland and a second focused on first year students in two disciplines, electrical engineering and psychology. Their findings identify not just the approaches already mentioned but that “the effects of the academic environment on approaches to learning occur in at least four different ways” (Entwistle and Tait, 1990, 190). They are: (1) the “level of performance reached by a student”; (2) the academic environment in terms of work load and learning constraints imposed on students; (3) a differential effect “in which the commonly agreed

perception of the academic environment depends on the individual differences between the learners”; (4) “where there are wide variations in the perceptions of students with contrasting predominant study orientations” (Entwistle & Tait, 1990, 190 to 191).

Another approach to defining types of learning is offered by Elander et al (2006). Their citing of three types of learning; “generic skills learning, a deep approach to learning, and complex learning” is complimentary to the Entwistle definitions even though they do not cite his work (Elander et al, 2006, 71). They cite King (1997) for their definition of complex learning as “construction of new knowledge” (Elander et al, 2006, 75). The writers assert that, “students are often more confused about what constitutes a good essay” than they are about the criteria for other types of assignment (Elander et al, 2006, 72). This is all the more problematic as essays “are often assumed to be the ideal form of assessment of the outcomes of taking a deep approach to learning” (Elander et al, 2006, 74). The group conclude that “the type of learning required to demonstrate the core criteria for written work is the learning of complex skills” (Elander et al, 2006, 84).

David Waters’ (2003) case study of lecturers that taught first year BA students in the University Of Tasmania highlights some of the educational challenges facing first year students and shows how difficult the acquisition of complex learning skills can be. Waters cites Cross who writes that, “For most entering students, college is like a giant jigsaw puzzle” (Cross, 1998, 1). Seventy one per cent of the 51 lecturers interviewed by Waters “agreed that teaching first-year students requires special attention”, but 22 per cent did not believe that anything special needed to be done (Waters, 2003, 298). Inadequate learning skills and lack of preparation was cited by 63 per cent of lecturers as the main problems facing first year students (Waters, 2003, 299), while 75 per cent of the lectures believed that, “the students do not know what is expected of them” and agreed that “good communication with students is vitally important for first-year students experience of university” (Waters, 2003, 300). Waters concludes with the assertion that the lecturers had a perception that “students are unaware of the need to become self sufficient in their learning, their reluctance to take responsibility for their own learning, and inadequate learning skills and strategies were common themes” (Waters, 2003, 303).

Gerald Graff takes a different slant on these dilemmas facing students and adds another challenge to successful assignment completion when he writes that, “As teachers we often proceed as if the rationale of our most basic academic practices is understood and shared by our students, even when we get plenty of signs to the contrary” (Graff, 2002, 27). One difficulty with academic thinking Graff highlights is that “students often resist the academic fixation with problems” and he writes that, “the difficulties students have in constructing a problem that launches an essay stem not only from their unfamiliarity with conventions of problem posing, but from deeper uncertainties about the ‘problematizing’ role itself”, (Graff, 2002, 29). Students Graff argues perceive “the value academia places in making ‘arguable’ statements... not only needlessly embattled, but flatly illogical” (Graff, 2002, 35). Graff continues to tackle other academic favourites such as the use of the word criticism and argument writing that “For many students, the very word ‘argument’ (like ‘criticism’) conjures up an image not of spirited conversational give and take, but of acrimonious warfare in which competitors revile each other” (Graff, 2002, 38). In the digital world of students’ arguments when they happen are vicious, cyber bullying and internet ‘flaming’ are the sordid downside to this socially networked existence, so to enter an academic world of argument, assertions made and denied and boundless criticism is perhaps overly threatening and leads ultimately to lower quality and failing assignments. If we accept Graff’s ‘argument’ there is a need then to introduce students formally to the language of academia.

Research Findings

For the past three years of lecturing Research Methods, a first year class taken jointly with another lecturer, the internet and email were used as part of the assignment guidelines and instructions.

In each year the student was required to email the author within a fixed time window, outlining what was their topic for the assignment. In 2006, the assignment involved the students selecting a news event to conduct a small framing exercise while in 2007 and 2008, the students had to conduct a media framing exercise in the context of an analysis of news media articles on opinion polls. In each case the author would reply with either an endorsement of their topic, sources etc or suggestions for improvement or a more bald rejection of the student proposal, asking them to think again.

The students then had to meet two deadlines relating to their assignment, one for early clearing of their topic and one for the final hand in. No marks were lost for missing the first deadline. Records were kept of who emailed, how many emails were received and a comparison was made with marks awarded across the three years.

The aim of such a strategy was to get the students thinking about their assignment at least four weeks before the final submission deadline in the hope, that it might increase assignment completion rates and average marks while also creating conditions for the student to be able to move from superficial approaches to learning to deeper and achieving approaches as described earlier by Struyven, Dochy and Janssens (2005).

The author used both email and the internet for two reasons. Firstly, to create an individual dialogue with students that was recorded so the student could reference what was said and secondly, to promote the internet as a research tool. In order to receive email, the student would have to go online and begin their assignment research. Jonathan Glater outlines the pros and cons of an email based communication strategy with students. Glater writes that “email has made professors much more approachable. But many say it has made them too accessible, erasing boundaries that traditionally kept students at a healthy distance” (Glater, 2006).

Bruner, Yates and Adams (2008) recent survey of 700 journalism and mass communication faculty lecturers provides a unique snapshot of perceptions of student email use. 53 per cent “indicated they frequently or very frequently receive emails that do not include salutations”, 30 per cent reported students using inappropriate greetings, 60 per cent said they never receive abusive emails, while 33 per cent reported this as happening rarely, 42 per cent did though occasionally receive emails complaining about grades awarded. (Bruner et al, 2008, 3). “Did we do anything in class today” was an email occasionally received by 40 per cent of lecturers with nearly 31per cent reporting getting such emails frequently (Bruner et al, 2008, 4). In their conclusions the group recommend that “faculty might also want to establish an e-mail policy in their syllabi” (Bruner et al, 2008, 5)

(i) Response Rates

As can be seen from table 1, there is a significant difference in student response rates across the three years. In 2006, 79.4 per cent of students emailed compared to 45.5 per cent in 2007 and 63 per cent in 2008. In the author's opinion, the difference for the fall in responses during 2007 was, that in this year the assignment title was not on Moodle, the student intranet used by the college and actively recommended to students.

It is clear that the ability to access all the needed assignment information on line by accessing the Griffith intranet improves student response rather than having to find the hard copy assignment instructions. In 2006 and 2008 the student had access to a hard and soft copy of the assignment title. In 2007 the student had a hard copy only provided during the first lecture of the module with an OHP version frequently put up during class in the subsequent weeks.

TABLE 1

Email: Student response rate

	Total number of students	Number of students emailing	Response Rate
2006	68	54	79.4 per cent
2007	77	35	45.5 per cent
2008	65	41	63 per cent

(ii) Mail Frequencies

TABLE 2

Email: Frequencies of mail sent by students

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>Total</u>
2006	41	6	3	1	1	1	none	80
2007	22	9	4	none	none	none	none	52
2008	29	6	3	1	1	1	1	69

In each year most students only needed to email the author once and in each year more than half of the students were catered for by two emails. The percentages for

finishing assignment dialogue with all students within 2 emails for 2006 to '08 were 58.75 per cent, 59.61 per cent and 50.72 per cent respectively.

(iii) Comparing the Student Marks

TABLE 3

Marks compared 1:	<u>Students who emailed and those who didn't</u>			
	Average mark Students who emailed	Average mark Students who did not email	Pass rate Students who emailed	Pass rate Students who did not email
2006	54.89 per cent 14.3 per cent	50.5 per cent*		85.2 per cent
2007	52.36 per cent 50 per cent	49.41 per cent		88.6 per cent
2008	55.05 per cent 100 per cent	50.44 per cent		94.7 per cent

*In 2006 of the 14 student who did not email, only 2 submitted written work

In each year the average mark of students who emailed the author was higher than the average of those who did not. There is solidity in the pass rate of the students who did email compared to quite erratic percentage pass rates for those who did not. In each year the pass rate for both groups has increased marginally, see Table 3.

However when we look at the overall grade achieved by students there are interesting differences between the two groups with a skewing towards lower grades among the students who did not email compared to a more balanced distribution of grades among the students who did email, see Table 4 and 5.

TABLE 4

Marks compared 2:	<u>Students who emailed, frequency of grades</u>							
	<34	35-39	40-49	50-54	55-59	60-69	70-79	>80
2006	none	1	13	10	5	12	5	none
2007	2	3	11	1	4	7	3	2
2008	2	1	7	2	7	16	1	2

TABLE 5

Marks compared 2:	<u>Students who did not email, frequency of grades</u>							
	<34	35-39	40-49	50-54	55-59	60-69	70-79	>80
2006	none	none	1	1	none	none	none	none
2007	none	3	4	7	1	1	1	none
2008	none	none	4	1	1	1	1	none

Another way of comparing the results between the two groups is to apply the third level ranking grid of H.22. H 2.1 and H1. These rankings are what determine whether a student can progress to post graduate study and table 6 breaks the results into categorises of H.22 or higher comparing students who emailed the lecturer and students who didn't. Table 6 below shows how there is a significant difference between students who emailed and who did not in terms of achieving a H.22 grade or higher.

TABLE 6

Marks Compared 3:	<u>Percentage who got a H.22 or higher emailers and non emailers compared</u>	
	<u>Percentage of emailing students achieving a H.22 or higher</u>	<u>Percentage of non-emailing students achieving a H.22 or higher</u>
2006	39.3 per cent	0per cent
2007	48.5 per cent	17.6 per cent
2008	68.4 per cent	37.5 per cent

(iv) When did the students email?

	<u>Early</u> (No/per cent)	<u>On the day</u> (No/per cent)	<u>Late</u> (No/per cent)	<u>per cent Early & on the day</u>
2006	13/24.1 per cent	16/29.6 per cent	25/46.3 per cent	53 per cent
2007	19/54.3 per cent	11/31 per cent	5/14.3 per cent	85.7 per cent
2008	5/12.2 per cent	29/70.7 per cent	7/17.1 per cent	82 per cent

A high proportion of students emailed each year. The difference between the first year with 53 per cent emailing early or on the day and the second and third years with over 80 per cent emailing early or on the day could be explained by the fact that in years 2 and 3 it was the author's assignment while in the first year it was a joint assignment with the students emailing one lecturer and submitting it to another.

Attempts were made to try and compare student results with time of email, but with a small sample size there was no obvious correlation, though it could be noted that international students tended to email early.

Conclusions

There are three dominant themes that emerge from the discussion of the research literature and the analysis of the student data over the three years. They are: (1) the issue of the impact of new media and ICT on the third level student; (2) the benefit to students in terms of higher marks, and hence deeper and more complex learning, through engaging in early assignment preparation and an email dialogue with the lecturer and (3) the need for a blended approach to teaching, carefully using both traditional class based discussion on assignments with a complementary utilisation of ICT resources, to enhance students critical academic skills and understand the role of ICT within their study and its wider social impacts.

The most striking conclusion to be drawn from analysing the three years of student records was that students who did email achieved on average higher grades than those who didn't, particularly in the critical cut off point of a H2.2 or higher grade.

However there were other unforeseen outcomes, the content of student email provided useful material for inputting into the discussion in class about what was required in the assignment and in the critical 'how to do' nuts and bolts aspect of what was expected. It is here that the need for a blended approach to lectures became apparent. The use of email led to a much greater level of discussion between the lecturer and student on the assignment with the email dialogue providing a recordable insight for the lecturer and student into how students perceived and approached the assignment and how the lecturer comments on this.

The assignment criteria highlighted the limited digital literacy students had in terms of using Google and accessing media content on the web, or in being able to navigate the

web, critically evaluating and corroborating internet sources. These are new skills that students need to be taught a proficiency in.

Student difficulty in meeting assignment criteria such as understanding what is meant by terms such as, 'compare and contrast', 'offer an analysis' and 'provide a conclusion' also highlighted gaps in the more traditional skills we expect students to demonstrate. Evidence of the changing adolescent environment was also demonstrated by the students' difficulty in understanding what was a news media web site, as they rarely if ever visited one, and had no experience of visiting three as required to meet the assignment criteria. Some of the weaker students who had missed class or had not studied the readings had difficulty applying the definition of what was a statistically valid poll as distinct from pseudo polls to the assignment criteria.

Students are finding it increasingly difficult to comprehend the language of academia while having also to meet the newer challenge of navigating the new digital media, utilising ICT technologies along the way. From a classroom perspective teaching has moved from a student expectation of talk and chalk methodologies, or OHP based lectures to power point presentations, notes online, with the lecturer going online during class, accessing websites and sources.

However students are more than willing to use the ICT technologies than they would be to enter a library. The provision of power point presentations, notes online also encourages and aids the student sitting down to begin an assignment. However it is unclear whether these new ICT resources will aid deeper and complex study approaches by the student.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Methods Assignment, February 2006

Assignment:

Perform a quantitative content analysis and evaluate the findings. Select a media event which is covered in at least four different publications. [Email Robbie Smyth (robbie.smyth@gcd.ie) with your chosen media event and your hypothesis before March 13th]. The reports should be from the same day if it is a daily publication or in the same week if it is a weekly publication.

Marks will be given for the following components:

- **Definition of the research problem and hypothesis offered**
- Selection of media and sample
- Construction a coding schedule

- Data preparation and analysis

plus

A critical evaluation of the quantitative study that you have completed. What are its strengths and its weaknesses?

Due date:

Assignment will be collected in class on **Thursday 30th March 2006 at 9.30am**. If you miss this deadline please submit your assignment into the late submission box (outside D014) and marks will be deducted accordingly.

Word count: Minimum 1,500 words. Assignments should be typed using font size 10/12pt and with a 1.5 line spacing.

Referencing:

Your work should be referenced correctly and each assignment should contain a bibliography. The Harvard System is recommended for referencing. See the Library section on Moodle for more detailed instructions on how to reference correctly but, in short, books should be referenced in your bibliography as follows:

Coelho, Paulo, 2001. *The Devil and Miss Prym*. London: HarperCollins

And newspaper articles as follows:

Browne, Vincent, 2003. 'Call for libel laws reform', *The Irish Times*, 21st October 2003, p9.

Or when the author is unknown:

'Call for libel law reform', *The Irish Times*, 21st October 2003, p9.

Appendix 2: Research Methods Assignment, February 2007

Research Methods Assignment (Robbie Smyth)

An examination of opinion polls in the media

Using the Internet or Lexis Nexis as a source, or newspapers you see in the coming weeks, compare and contrast the media coverage of three recent opinion polls, (not Voodoo or straw polls)

Comment on the significance of the polls and on what impact you think if any they would have on public opinion.

Length, approximately 1,500 words

The paper must have an introduction of 150 to 250 words, outlining why you selected the three polls in question. It must have an analysis of each poll, 300 words plus for each one. Finally a conclusion summarising your findings

Each student must email me at robbie.smyth@gcd.ie before 9am on Monday March 5th outlining which three polls they are picking and what sources they come from.

Assignment due in class on Monday March 26th

