The E-flective Practitioner: Using blogs to enhance Reflective Practice at Postgraduate level in Art and Design

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Blogs form a vital part of the collaborative space in which postgraduates interact with each other and with tutors and industry professionals; operating as the core of the learning circle, connecting and interlinking its stages and transforming practical assignments into an Schonian repertoire of experience that prepares the student for professional practice. Their real time nature and the seamless mashing up of ideas, reflections, images, links and emotions of the blogging format create the foundations for a future generation of E-flective Practitioners.

This paper discusses how the MA in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography uses blogs to map the participants learning journey on the course in both full time face-to-face and fully online part time modes.

Blogs act as a conduit of connected knowledge between the teaching staff and the cohort, offering an unparralled insight into the working methodologies, influences, problems and successes of the group in real time in a way traditional tutorial forms cannot replicate.

The course recruits mature students who are mid-career professionals looking to deepen and extend their practice, or who are looking to gain the skills and methodological toolbox to operate as professional photographers in an editorial and documentary context.

Through student feedback and analysis of the role of blogs on the course, the course team identified several key features of blogs, identifying both the strengths and potential problem areas; and how they map onto Schon’s concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action:

• Blogs offer an extraordinary insight into the students practice, detailing the practical, conceptual and ethical issues
they faced and documenting how successfully they overcame them in real time.

- The blog acts as a space to explore the relationship between the professional and the personal, and to delineate those areas that can be discussed in the professional sphere and those that need to remain in the personal, so the blog can act as a sandbox to establish what is Professional not Confessional

- Blogs rapidly build a collaborative community, especially on the online course, as blogs give a rapid and deep insight into the personality of the blogger

- They help individual students organise their thoughts and document their workflow, essentially becoming an online workbook/sketchbook for their ideas

- The blog format because of its informal nature allows students to express their ideas in a non-threatening way, and get valuable peer group and staff feedback.

- Blogs allows students to present their other interests outside of course work, giving a sense of the whole person

- Blogs are ‘authentic’, in that grounded in experience, reflective diaries depict personal observations and emotions

- The blogs form an instant ‘archive of the creative process’

Our conclusion is that a more widespread use of blogs in Art and Design could easily replace or supplement the traditional analogue workbook, as they open out the creative process to a wider audience, allowing much more interaction and feedback between the students, tutors and the world outside, and they enhance the deep learning of reflective practice.