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Background

Feedback from students at the end of the previous academic year suggested the use of social media to help them engage more during lectures and tutorials. This feedback, along with research by both Chris Evans¹ and Daniel Fusch² regarding the use of social media, became the focus of this project.

The Project

University students were encouraged to tweet during lectures and tutorials in two particular courses throughout the academic year in order to determine if this would impact on their engagement and learning.

The students in the study were first and second year undergraduate students on the four-year MA Primary Education Programme. While the main focus was on the engagement of the students through the use of social media, it was clear that the pedagogy to be used would also impact on engagement.

This pedagogy emulated best practice from the Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland's "National Curriculum"), using, in particular, active learning³.

Results

Positive changes in students' behaviour, attitudes and skills were quickly observed.

In tutorials, students:

- a) demonstrated a higher level of confidence to ask questions and contribute opinions and comments (behaviour);
- b) engaged more in their learning (attitudes);
- c) identified ways to use the software to support learning such as peer-assessment and referencing (skills)

In lectures, students:

- a) focussed more on the lecture with fewer 'back of the room'/off-task conversations (behaviour)
- b) engaged actively with the lecture (attitudes);
- c) learned to note-take using social media as well as sharing references, weblinks and their own professional learning (skills).

As the project progressed, three main types of tweets were identified:

- 1) questions/answers;
- 2) reflections;
- 3) reporting

and these helped the lecturer to hone these behaviours, attitudes and

skills in both lectures and tutorials.

Conclusion

While this project is still on-going, early results have shown that during the lecture/tutorial, students are reflecting more on the main lecture points, asking (and answering) relevant questions (particularly by students who are traditionally more-reserved) and they are tweeting web links and academic references which link to wider reading and engagement with the subject.

It is clear that the shift in pedagogy from a traditionally-based 'lecture' style approach to a student-centered, active-learning approach has had an impact on this study. A complete re-writing of the course material has been necessary in order to model active learning. All the students on the project are studying for a degree in which this modeling is expected and this certainly made the transition easier. However, there are teaching implications such as shifting students' mindsets, pacing and amount of material covered of which the lecturer must be aware.

The author will reflect on the impact tweeting has had on both student engagement and the methodologies used in his own practice for lectures and tutorials. Preliminary evaluation data has shown that responding to live comments/questions and the active-learning pedagogy provided students with lectures which were considered more engaging and interactive. The next stage of the project will be to determine if the rise in engagement will translate to an increase in academic achievement.

References

- 1 Evans, C [2013]. *Twitter for teaching: Can social media be used to enhance the process of learning? British Journal of Educational Technology*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12099>)
- 2 Daniel Fusch (Fusch, D [2011]. *Social Media and Student Learning: Moving the Needle on Engagement. Academic Impressions*. <http://www.academicimpressions.com/news/social-media-and-student-learning-moving-needle-engagement>) which discuss the possible impact of social media (and appropriate accompanying pedagogy) for students in higher education.
- 3 About Active Learning - <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/activelearning>