

Researching Scholarship in the Age of the Internet

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In this paper I will review current debates about the nature of scholarship in higher education (following Boyer 1990) and the impact of digital communication practices on its role in research and teaching (e.g. Borgman 2007, Pearce et al 2010), and discuss a methodological framework for researching these issues, drawing on work in Situated Literacies (Ivanić et al 2007) and Socio-technical Interaction (Kling et al 2003).

Four dimensions of scholarship in the digital university will be considered. Two under the heading 'traditional scholarship': the autonomous disciplines and practice fields that contribute to institutional research portfolios and teaching curricula; and the institutional and sectoral missions that determine how resources are allocated amongst scholars working in these disciplines and fields. And two under 'Internet practice': the digital tools and applications that are ubiquitous in everyday life and are increasingly being adopted in professional contexts; and the specific practices around the sharing of digital resources that are prevalent in the leisure and other 'culture' industries and which are gaining influence in educational sectors.

These separate dimensions of scholarship, I suggest, generate practices which work both in synergy and in tension with each other, such that no single conceptual/methodological framework adequately accounts for all their effects. This can be illustrated by some of the discussion that has occurred in the previous two seminars in this series: informed by both a 'literacies' (texts and textual practices) perspective, and a 'learning technologies' (media and interactions) one (e.g. see the LiDU blog March 2nd 2010).

As a contribution to the LiDU project of marrying these perspectives I will examine how two conceptual frameworks, characteristic of these perspectives, might be applied to some examples of contexts where new practices and understandings of scholarship are attendant on new forms of digital communication. One is from the Literacies for Learning in Further Education work which our colleagues at Lancaster have been pursuing (Ivanić et al op. cit and Ivanić & Satchwell 2007), and which Mary, Candice and David presented in Glasgow, and the other is from work in Information Science (Kling et al op cit) and Educational Technology (Barab et al 2001). See the table below:

| Texts & Textual Practices frame (Ivanić et al) | Socio-Technical Interaction Network frame (Kling et al) |
|--|---|
| audience text type(s) / genre(s) content/topic(s) media modes artefacts: tools and resources purpose(s) participant(s) and relationships feelings activity/processes place/space time/duration values associated with the practice identities inscribed in the practice | system interactors core interactor groups incentive structures excluded actors and undesired interactions existing key mediation systems resource flows architectural choice points socio-technical features (mapped to architectural choice points) |

The contexts in which I will explore these frameworks are as follows:

- 1) Blogging by academic scholars in different disciplinary areas and practice fields
- 2) The use of digital repositories of research on professional practice by scholars, managers and practitioners in the Health and Care sectors

- 3) Citizen engagement in the communication of Climate Science scholarship via Internet media
- 4) Public creativity around online resources created by the V&A Museum

For all these contexts, I suggest, combining a 'Literacies' perspective on the texts and textual practices of individual participants, with a 'sociotechnical network' view of the wider interactions in which these texts and practices are embedded, helps us to understand better the forces for change that conventional constructions of scholarship, and scholars, are subject to in these domains. Whether such an understanding can help us to preserve or enhance more traditional, but still highly valued, functions of the academic university in the face of a digital future is another question!

References

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