Richard Huish College: Facebook and Blogger: Using Social Media to enhance communication

Summary

Geography Teacher Millie Watts has successfully used social media, in particular Facebook and Blogger to enhance and improve her students’ communication, peer review and access to resources. Such has been the impact of these developments that one student in particular has been able to forge real-life business links and work experience placements outside the college as well as generate an e-portfolio that really stands out. Radio broadcasts are also being used to provide Q&A sessions for students that need extended support.

About Richard Huish College

The college has over 2000 students, most taking full time A-level courses. There is a growing range of professional courses for adult students, primarily for business and accounting. With a strong emphasis on preparing students for HE through its Advanced-level courses, the college also gained an outstanding Ofsted grading in 2007.

The college attracts students from the local area and also Somerset as a whole and has a good selection of enrichment activities for full-time students.

The challenge

One of the main challenges in the development of Facebook in particular was the sense of negative feedback amongst staff and the feeling that it was something best avoided within an educational context. It was also a challenge to not only change the culture, but to develop a code of conduct and educate staff about best practice.

Providing the correct guidance and support for staff and helping them to manage their own privacy on Facebook and ensure that the right procedures were adhered to was an important and serious consideration for the project as a whole.
Another important element in the adoption of Facebook for Richard Huish College has been to educate the students about social networking and provide a clear message for key factors of safeguarding and helping to protect both staff and students from cyberbullying issues. The code of conduct has clearly defined rules and puts in place the right messages for the students about the correct level of conduct at all times.

The college opted to develop a Facebook organisation page as they felt that this would offer more flexibility, interaction and access to resources, and the ability to embed Facebook Apps, while also protecting the identity of its staff.

**The activity**

The college initially setup the Facebook pages in 2009 and Millie spent a lot of time creating a code of conduct for social media and particularly Facebook. Before they launched the college Facebook pages there was an extensive period of staff development and focus around the following key issues:

- How to use Facebook
- Privacy settings
- Advice and guidance
- Conduct
- eSafety and safeguarding
- Cyberbullying
- Child protection

All the above issues were covered within the staff training and even the principal of the college was trained. This was a key aspect in the development of the college Facebook profile.

One of the clear messages within the code of conduct is that no member of staff can be friends with a student and no content on staff personal pages should be viewable within the public domain. So their profiles must not be viewable within Google search results. Postings for staff must be to friends only and it is down to the original member of staff to manage their own friends list. Millie also helped to create a fictional character within Facebook called Yuri Histrovski, who is an historical interpretation representing the life of a Russian peasant. This was done to try and imagine what it would be like for someone from the past to use a social network and makes for an interesting adaptation.

In terms of offering more support for her students and provide greater access to content Millie setup a blog called “What I taught in Geography this week” this aimed to include not only what had been covered in the classroom, but also further resources and links that the students could use.
Millie enhanced the blog further by embedding what is called a ‘ticker’, which enables students to ask questions through the CoveritLive app into the blog.

Millie used this app to embed an anonymous service for students to ask questions about anything related to their studies. The questions and her replies would be approved by Millie before being visible to the public. This offers students the opportunity to use an additional service to aid their understanding. As Millie explained, ‘The ability to ask things anonymously is quite important because what we do tend to see is a bit of a paradox in that the really quiet students who don’t like to put their hands up in class are the ones that will engage the most online.’

Vicki Taylor, a keen geography student decided that she would setup her own blog site called ‘What I learned in Geography this week’. This would be a place that she could use to not only cover the subjects being taught in class. But also as an area that she could use as a potential e-portfolio to demonstrate her work.
Millie has recently setup an online radio show every Tuesday evening to help her students further and enable her to answer all the questions she receives through the CoveritLive app on the blog.
The process involves:

- Using Mixla for the radio show itself
- The recording is exported through Dropbox
- The radio show is uploaded to Podsnack
- Enabling Millie to embed it into the blog

**The outcomes**

The main outcomes of the projects have been very positive, the key benefits for the college through using blogs, Facebook and Radio are:

- Enhanced communication
- Improved peer support and review
- Greater access to resources
- More versatility for students
- Improved confidence with the students
- Real-life business links
- Measured improvements in usage
- More opportunities for students to engage
- Easier to communicate with students
- Students have instant access to news updates and classroom materials
- The college exists the place that the students ‘hang out’ online
- Updates on the blogs appear in Facebook automatically and on the students’ wall.
- During exam periods the blogs and resources have been used very extensively by the students.

The radio show has enabled students with another place that they can tune into and also helped to answer their questions in an interesting and dynamic way. These resources are all very flexible and can be replayed at any time that is convenient to the student through a range of mobile devices.

**The impact**

The main impact of the project has been:

- Parents are finding the blogs and using their smart phones to access content
- Students have continued access to content after they leave college
- The college can see what past students are doing and measure their progress
- Students’ research, writing and communication skills have been enhanced
- Staff can monitor student progress and provide more updates on content and resources
- Vicki has seen an improvement in her grades
- Millie’s blog has been viewed over 10,000 times
- Vicki’s blog has been viewed over 16,000 times
The following comments have been provided:

“I definitely think that I have learnt a lot of new skills; I have found a love for researching through the blogs which has really helped with my EPQ over the summer holidays. It really helps me consolidate the learning that I do which is obviously something that I think I have perhaps struggled with before.” Vicki Taylor, a keen geography student

“I think it’s better than communicating just verbally, if it’s online the students can go back to it any time, they can access it, it’s interactive and for some reason they are far more likely to click on a hyperlink and follow it through to something else to read.” Millie Watts, Geography Teacher

“I definitely think that the blogs and Facebook pages have made the learning so much more interesting. It’s added another dimension to us sat in classrooms looking at text books and watching PowerPoint presentations.” Vicki Taylor, a keen geography student

“We can still keep up with our learning; you’ve got that continued contact that makes it so much easier to access now than it was before. If we need help we just ask on the Facebook pages and pretty quickly we normally get a response.” Vicki Taylor, a keen geography student.

Another positive outcome and demonstration of the impact the use of social media has had on Vicki has been the fact that her blog has helped her to gain valuable work experience at the Met Office. So Vicki is actively engaged with an organisation through her blog and opening up potential future employment opportunities.

As Vicki further commented, “Before Millie asked me to get involved in blogs I didn’t even realise that people did this kind of thing and it’s turned out to be an incredible revision resource for me that I think I’ll probably continue for a while past college because it really works and I think that’s evident.”

**Useful links**

- [Jisc RSC South West website](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)
- [What I learnt in Geography this week](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)
- [What I taught in Geography this week](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)
- [Richard Huish College Yuri Histrovski pages](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)
- [Millie’s Geology blog](http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies)
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