

Paper 139 – Pecha Kucha

The Challenge of Authenticity: Learning and Teaching "Professional Skills"

Catherine Cronin

National University of Ireland, Galway catherine.cronin@nuigalway.ie

Abstract

This Pecha Kucha presentation will describe the experiences and accomplishments of one group of adventurous students in a Professional Skills module. Learning together, students and their lecturer experimented with learning technologies, social networking tools and assessment formats – resulting in creative and authentic ways to demonstrate and assess learning. This presentation will focus on what was tried, what was learned and what is planned for next term.

The objective of the Professional Skills module is to improve research, writing and presentation skills. When the module was first conceived ten years ago, students learned the basics of these skills, submitted a written report and delivered an in-class PowerPoint presentation. The activities of today's Professional Skills students bear little resemblance to this. In addition to the original topics, the module now includes digital literacy, critical media awareness and social networking. This presentation will describe the new assessment structure of the module which focused on *authentic assessment*, i.e. writing for an authentic audience, awareness of social presence, and enabling peer and public feedback.

Options chosen by students for their final writing assignments included: creating/editing Wikipedia articles, creating blogs, and creating online "tip sheets" for 1st year IT students on research, writing and/or referencing skills which they had learned. All final assessment work was produced after earlier submissions on which formative feedback had been provided. Students produced work of an exceptionally high standard: a few visual examples will be shared in the presentation. Student survey feedback indicated that students enjoyed opportunities for authentic assessment, were motivated to produce work of a high standard, and understood that work shared online forms part of their digital identity. Ideas for next year include providing more opportunities for interaction, peer feedback and online publishing.