

Digital Content Curation for the Implementation of Innovative Writing Projects

Curación de contenidos para la implementación de proyectos de escritura innovadores

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Referencia bibliográfica/ bibliographic reference:

Herrera, E. (2019). Digital Content Curation for the Implementation of Innovative Writing Projects. *Yulök Revista de Innovación Académica*. 3(2), 76-81.

Recibido: 5 de diciembre del 2018

Aceptado: 22 de noviembre del 2019

Publicado: 11 de diciembre del 2019

Abstract

Teaching writing requires a different and more detailed organization than teaching speaking. Since many students do not see the importance and practical use of writing, they easily get discouraged. When planning a course, looking for techniques to offer students an attractive learning environment where they can understand how writing works in the modern world is crucial. In our present work, we give useful information that can contribute to gear writing to a real-life context by using digital content curation as a tool for teachers to plan classes. Digital content curation works as a means to create different activities that inspire students to write and present their work through e-portfolios. Different from the traditional portfolios, E-portfolios are flexible, give students the chance to be creative in their designs, be reflective about their work, and improve their digital composition skills. We implemented this technique in a writing course of the English as a Second Language Major (ILE) at Universidad Técnica Nacional. By curating digital context, the quality of materials, the process of pedagogical mediation, and learning environment design were highly improved.

Keywords: digital content curation, innovative writing projects

Resumen

La enseñanza de la escritura requiere una organización más detallada que la que se requiere para la enseñanza de los cursos orales. Debido a que los estudiantes no ven la importancia práctica de la escritura, se desmotivan con facilidad. Cuando se planea un curso, la búsqueda de técnicas para ofrecer a los estudiantes ambientes de aprendizaje interesantes donde puedan entender cómo se escribe en el mundo moderno es crucial. En este trabajo se brinda información útil que puede contribuir a guiar el proceso de escritura hacia un contexto real con el uso de la curación digital de contenidos como herramienta para que los profesores planeen sus clases. La curación digital de contenidos trabaja de modo que permite crear diferentes actividades que inspiran a los estudiantes a escribir y presentar sus trabajos a través de portafolios. Los portafolios digitales son flexibles, le dan al estudiante la oportunidad de ser creativo en sus diseños, reflexionar sobre su trabajo y mejorar sus habilidades digitales de escritura. Se implementó esta técnica en un curso de la carrera de inglés como lengua extranjera de la Universidad Técnica Nacional. Al usar la curación digital de contenidos, la calidad de materiales, el proceso de mediación pedagógica y el diseño de ambiente de aprendizaje se mejoró ampliamente.

Palabras clave: curación de contenidos, proyectos de escritura innovadores

Students' and Teachers' Digital Competence

During the last years, a part of the research in Educational Technology has been focused on the analysis of the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that individuals need to survive in the Information Society. It is not a specific reflection on the use of such or such technologies, nor on the efficiency of resources in learning or on the guidelines that should be followed at the time of their application to learning processes. On the contrary, it is a research topic of a much more transversal nature, which starts from the change that has taken place in the relationship of the human being with information and with the means to access it, to manage it and to transform it into knowledge, completely new to those used in previous eras. Not in vain, the digitization of many of the daily processes from the end of the 20th century and especially during the 21st century, demands of the citizens' new strategies to manage their own day to day, and, of course, learning processes are no exception to this.

Digital Competence

The reflection on digital competence takes its origin in a new vision of learning in formal studies that starts from the need to isolate that set of skills and knowledge that the individual must acquire and consolidate as an essential means to advance in their studies (in any formal stage, and throughout life). This set, called generic competencies of generic form, has developed in the university field with special depth.

There is no consensus so unanimous is in the definition of digital competence itself (which, in fact, is recognized in different denominations in the international arena). In this sense, Gisbert and Esteve (2011) point out the special complexity of bringing order to this conceptual disparity in direct relation with the complexity of the digital context to which it should serve and point out that it is a set of tools, knowledge and attitudes in the technological, communicative, media and informational fields that make up a complex and multiple literacy. Indeed, this idea of complexity and multiplicity is also included in the Ferrari proposal (2013), which develops the European Commission's reference framework, based on a proposal of five areas (information, communication, content creation, security and problem solving) that is specified in twenty-one competencies necessary to be a competent user in digital environments.

Digital Teaching Competence

Another issue connected with digital competence of students is the digital competence of teachers who must accompany these students in their training in the IS. As Esteve (2015) points out, it is not enough for the students of Education to acquire their own digital competence, as this does not guarantee that they develop the necessary skills to design learning strategies and accompany the students in their own competence acquisition process. In this sense, the change of paradigm operated in recent decades on the role of the teacher has much to do with it, which is no longer limited to being a mere transmitter of information but has become a guide or mentor, under the umbrella of the different socio-constructivist models of knowledge generation.

New Research Lines and Conclusions

Regarding the digital teaching competence, it is quite the advanced path, both in the conceptualization and in the design of learning strategies linked to this competence; and the advances that administrations and universities and their research groups are making in this regard are promising. However, it is also possible to identify interesting and important lines of research that should be developed in the immediate future and that have to do, in effect, with the two previous ones that we have referred for the digital competence of the university student. On the one hand, and in relation to the need of the educational authorities to allow the teaching staff the accreditation of the digital teaching competence (as a requisite for professional practice or as part of the professional career), is the development of instruments that allow accrediting said competition and that, as far as possible, contribute to a transparent, global and efficient certification process from the point of use of material, temporary and human resources.

Content Curation and Writing

When teaching a foreign language, one of the most difficult skills to work with is writing. Therefore, teachers should consider what steps to take in order to motivate students and maximize their engagement and success. It is necessary to create a learning environment with clear objectives, appropriate guidance, varied options of assessment, challenging assignments, and real-life activities.

In this way, lesson planning becomes a significant element of the teaching-learning process. Lesson plans are a crucial structure to create an effective learning environment where students can achieve and enjoy the lifelong learning they need to face the demands of the XXI century. Smith (1987) cited by Clemans explains that

“Lifelong learning as a concept influencing higher education practice, therefore, opens up more than one point of entry for learners, but its purpose is to find a particular destination. Opening up different entry points prompts us to see the connections between our everyday experiences and the larger social and economic forms often encountered therein.”

Even though someone might think that lesson planning is easier today than in the past because of the access teachers have to all kinds of materials the Internet offers in the knowledge society we are living, the reality indicates something different, digital literacy, defined by the American Library Association Office for Information Technology Policy (2013) as the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills altered this task almost beyond all recognition. Teachers spend a lot of time looking for, downloading, categorizing, adapting, and preparing materials to use in class.

The overwhelming amount of information on the Internet, together with the fact that students today belong to the millennial generation of digital natives, and that a huge percentage of teachers are digital immigrants make the teaching skill to plan a class almost an odyssey. Teachers are flooded with technology through news, colleagues, and the same higher education institutions that want teachers to use as much technology as possible in their classes. The question is how to integrate effective technology in class? What technology should teachers use with thousands of alternatives at their disposal? Even though the panorama may look burdensome, there is a way out, which is digital content curation.

Digital Content Curation

According to Mills (2013, p. 47), **digital content curation** is the sifting and aggregation of the internet and other digital resources into a manageable collection of what teachers and students find relevant, personalized and dynamic. It incorporates the vibrancy of components of the Internet and provides a repository that is easily accessible

and usable. Digital curation is something similar to what people see when they use some of those streaming options for home television like Netflix or Amazon Prime. It is to have ready the information and tools you need, whenever and wherever you need it, in a personalized way. It facilitates the gathering, administration, access and circulation of digital resources teachers find during their planning time. Digital content curation takes time; however, the organized accumulation of these resources and tools helps save time in the long run. It is important to remember that digital content curation is not only to add a website to the bookmark section in the tool menu. It includes the contextualization of specific collections so that the curators can make it available for colleagues,

The process of digital content curation may sound difficult, but, in fact, it demands more collaborative work than specialized knowledge. This process can be applied to all kinds of content: websites, videos, audios and podcasts, images, books, articles, apps, etc.

Importance of Digital Content Curation

Digital content curation is a need for teachers. It gives teachers the opportunity to offer more and better materials, create practical learning environments, and complement assessment according to the expectations of the XXI century digital skills for life and work established by UNESCO in its ICT Competency Framework for Teachers in 2011. When this happens, students' motivation increases because there is a change in the traditional learning environment used in writing classes. The change from writing by using paper to be read by the teacher is changed into online writing creation by using a variety of tools and with the chance to reach an online audience in which their work is visible. Costley (2014) establishes that technology causes students to be more engaged; thus, students often retain more information. Because of the arrival of new technologies rapidly occurring globally, technology is relevant to the students. Technology provides meaningful learning experiences. (p. 2)

Even though experts mention different steps of digital content curation process, more of them agree on five basic stages. Vasquez et al., (2010) cited by Deschaine and Sharma propose these steps:

The Five Cs of Digital Curation

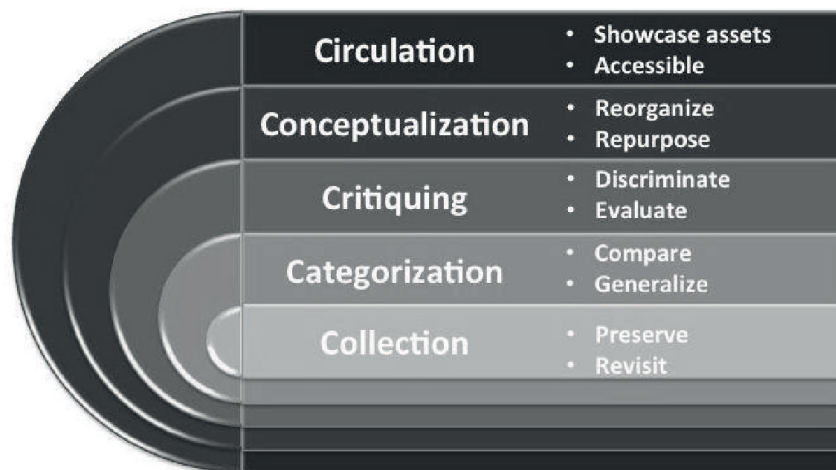


Figure 1. A Digital Curation Framework.

Collection

During this first step, the curators carefully search the web looking for all resources, videos, images, audios, apps, etc. that they consider are useful for the unit, content, or learning environment they are working on.

Categorization

Once there is a reasonable number of resources and tools, the curators proceed to evaluate, discriminate, and organize them. There are several tools curators can use to systematize the resources and tools to be used.

Critiquing

During this stage, the curators share among them and study all resources and tools previously categorized to critically discriminate and leave only the ones that are useful and necessary. It is recommended that several curators discuss and give their opinions and feedback about the materials because this stage is considered a quality control to assure everything is going to work in the most effective way.

Conceptualization

After the materials, resources, and tools have been strictly selected, it is necessary to check the previous categorization of them to see if some of them should be re-categorized into new categories or moved from one category to another.

Circulating

There is no point in working so hard in digital content curation if the curator keeps it for him/herself. The last step of the Digital content curation is when the curators share their materials, resources, and tools with colleagues, with students, and with the academic community in general. This is the culmination of an exhaustive work that will soon begin pay back.

Digital Portfolio for a Creative Writing Class

Writing is a highly academic challenge not only for students to achieve but also for a teacher to teach. Writing is much more than just paying attention to grammar, capitalization and punctuation. As a whole writing is a way of the communication of ideas that includes organization of information, critical thinking, and research in a logically structured way. Honestly, most students, who are learning a new language, do not like writing, and especially because they do not see the objective and functionality it has in real life. After analyzing this aspect, ILE teachers at UTN began exploring and proposing ideas by trying to offer a space beyond the pen and paper. Even though several teachers had used traditional portfolios and some technological tools to support writing class, they had not tried a digital portfolio. Cooper and Love (2007) cited by Scully, O'Leary, and Brown, defines a digital portfolio as an organized compilation that demonstrates knowledge, skills, values and/or achievements and that includes reflections or exegesis which articulate the relevance, credibility and meaning of the artifacts presented. (p. 2)

Rupnik Vec and Novak (2015) state that through the process of digital portfolio implementation, teachers support their students' self-regulation skills, their critical thinking skills, as well as creativity, communication and cooperation. Some other specific advantages of digital portfolios in comparison to the use of the traditional paper portfolios are:

Process

Digital portfolio	Traditional Paper Portfolio
It is a lifelong product.	It deteriorates, lost, and easily forgotten.
It is always available and easy to find.	It requires physical presence which means it is only available in the place where it is.
It allows varied organization and presentation with visual aid.	It usually responds to a specific format and rarely has visuals.
It can become a resource for others. It goes beyond the classroom.	It is usually limited to the period where it is prepared. It needs to be transported.
It improves the learner's ICT literacy skills.	It sticks to the traditional format.
It is available for further editing.	It cannot be edited.
It can include embedded information and files.	It is only what the owner presents.

Figure 2. Comparison between digital and traditional portfolios

After selecting the web tools to use when writing the different assignments for the portfolio, ILE professors either prepare or found tutorials on each web tool in order to support the instructional technology component of the digital portfolio. Listed below are the website tools used for digital content curation in the writing project implemented in the English as a Second Language Major (ILE) at UTN:

Website	Description	Pedagogical application in a writing course
https://elink.io and http://www.skloog.com	Social bookmarking websites: a visual collection of links that can be shared as an email newsletter, embedded on a blog/website or shared as a web page. Access to the website is not exclusively linked to a computer.	Visual collection and categorization of resources of important interest in area of study.
https://www.weebly.com/cr and https://es.jimdo.com	Web hosting services, that allow users to build their own website.	Portfolio creation where personal writing work is saved and shared.
https://storybird.com	Web tool to build mini picture books with artistic illustrations.	Picture book creation and publication website to engage students in online design of their own writing work.
https://marvelcreateyourowntaptapcomics.com and https://www.pixton.com	Web tools that allow students to construct their own comic strips.	Creation of stories with the introduction of literary terms as plot, characters, setting, etc.
https://www.canva.com/create/infographics/ and https://piktochart.com	Web tools to create graphic designs such as flyers, infographics, and posters.	Creation of visual stories or infographics used reporting tools.

Figure 3. Web Tools used for ILE digital portfolios.

Next, a chronogram of activities with their corresponding office hours/online consultation, and due date, list of web tools and access to tutorials, and rubrics for the evaluation are given to students. In addition, if students have questions about the use of technology, they can also talk to the lab assistant.

At the end of the process, students share their digital portfolios with classmates and receive feedback, so the digital portfolio owner has the chance to show his/her work to a wider audience. Moreover, the feedback that they will receive will help the owner reflect on how his/her digital portfolio can be improved.

Finally, students fill out a survey in which they give their opinions about the experience. Their answers and feedback will be useful input in order to improve the whole activity next time the course is offered.

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