Educational blogging – a personal perspective

Hi my name is Dennis Dunleavy, I am an educator and a blogger and I have been blogging since about 2004, when I started thinking about being able to extend my research and my interests outside of my classroom to build a bigger learning community.

It sort of at the time fit with what my interests were, particularly in visual culture, there was a lot of things happening that I feel like I can explore in new ways, so I wanted to talk a little bit about why I think blogging is an option for educators, that blogging is definitely not something for everyone, that you should go into blogging with the mind-set that it is an extension of your teaching and you should still have very clear learning objectives or outcomes, and that you should have a particular theme or topic that you can be able to explore the scenario that builds a bigger audience, a bigger community.

So having a clear mission with what you are doing in blogging becomes really, really important, so for me educational blogging has been rewarding because I see it both as a service as well as scholarship. I approach my writing just like I approach any type of academic writing, as far as verifiability, objectivity, accountability, making sure that all my facts were straight and then writing in a way that is more accessible to different audiences. That is what makes blogging as an educator a little bit different and building kind of an outreach, a platform for others to become involved, so I like very much the idea that I can use educational blogging as a way of an incubator for new ideas, for sharing ideas for being able to have it as a reference for other things as well. Not necessarily to replace other types of scholarship, but to really supplement them.

To be an effective blogger for me I found that I have to write and reach out to my audience at least three or four times a week, so it’s quite a commitment. My style, as I said, is kind of accessible, I try to write in a language that lots of people will understand, I use a lot of links to other articles and to other blogs, I use a lot of formal citations as well and try to keep my writing as academic as possible.

In addition on my blog space I always have a profile and I have a blog wall, which lets the viewers link to other bloggers or other websites that are in kind of the same theme, the same area. So making sure that your work is verifiable, that people can go back and check what you have done, maintaining a profile so you can add your resumé to it, also being able to connect to other social media like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Academic EDU, all those are really helpful and so I have my blog connected to those other social media sites and when I post something on my blog it pushes right to my Facebook, so somebody that follows me on Facebook can see what I just wrote, the same thing with Twitter, so there is this kind of integration between the different social medias that is really, really effective.
So it’s important to kind of take a more open view, it’s much more accepted now in academics institutionally, to be blogging early on, like in 2004 it was kind of an unknown, but people have come to accept it. So you need to consider how you are going to use your time as a blogger, balance it out with the other academic interests, your other scholarship, your other service and any commitments that you have, so you can definitely engage in blogging but you need to go with kind of a clear view of what it is and have a strategy for it and build an audience over time. A couple of other things to consider is, you know, copyright, making sure that you honor other people’s intellectual property and also for me I have always had a disclaimer on my site – or my blog – I have always put that these opinions are my opinions and not the opinions of the institution.

It is also good to check in with your colleagues and your institution as well as your administration. So at least they know what you are doing and not for approval, just so there are no surprises as you go ahead with your work. So there are lots of resources out there on the web to set up a blog. There are some really good third-party hosting sites, like WordPress, Tumblr, I use Six Apart Typepad, which I have used for years and I like very much, but you can find a number of different third-party hosts for your blogs that are free and they oftentimes have some really nice themes.

Simple is always better, keeping it simple, not putting a lot of stuff on there, I also – my sites have never been commercial – I don’t take ads, I don’t have any conflicts of interest, it is just pure education. I think that is what makes it different than other types of blogging, is that I am not trying to make a profit out of it, just to try to share information with others.

So that is a little bit about blogging from my perspective and how I feel it can be a really rewarding experience for educators.