Enhancing student collaboration through a Google suite
Faculty of Arts | Department of Drama

Module: Theatre Arts 178
Lecturer: Dr Rufus Swart rswart@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Advisor: Dr Faiq Waghid faiq@sun.ac.za

Learning activity:
Collaborative student presentations

Learning technology:
Google Suite

Context
Background
The Stellenbosch University Drama Department's annual intake usually amounts to about 50 students in the acting stream. Having been responsible for the module since 2011, the lecturer describes the module as an essential component in the development of a drama student.

Subject area
In this module, students are introduced to a number of key theories relating to the works of various 20th century theatre practitioners. These renowned practitioners include the foremost acting teachers of the last century and their ideologies.

Established practice and challenges
Initially, the lecturer made use of traditional pedagogies through which he conveyed the content pertaining to the theatre practitioners. He felt, however, that he was not doing justice to the content and not allowing his students the time to internalise what was covered in class meaningfully. This experience is shared by many lectures in the Stellenbosch University context. Lecturers are often constrained by a lack of teaching time, having to convey large volumes of content to students in small timeframes, a problem that the lecturer encountered in the offering of his module. Being allocated a single period per week left little opportunity for him to engage with his students meaningfully around the theories of the aforementioned practitioners.

Advantages associated with the integration of technology
After consultation with the Faculty advisors operating in the Faculty of Arts' Teaching and Learning Hub, the lecturer was advised to try a blended mode of delivery, as his traditional pedagogies were being constrained by time. After many consultations with the Teaching and Learning Hub of other faculties and enrolling for the blended learning short course offered by the Centre for Learning Technologies at the University, it was decided that a blended learning approach would not only address the problems that the lecturer had with time but also create opportunities for more engaging forms of learning for his students both within and beyond the confines of the lecture hall.

Learning through capitalising on the strengths of face-to-face and online learning experiences engendered learning through acquisition and through inquiry, discussion, collaboration, practice and production (Laurillard, 2012). In this way, the students could also assume responsibility for their own learning.

The tools that best facilitated such a learning experience was the Google collaboration suite, a free tool that shares many high-end features with the far more expensive Microsoft Office Suite.

Other relevant role-players
The lecturer engaged with the Centre for Teaching and Learning representative and the Faculty librarian for advice on specific pedagogical issues.

Learning and assessment activities
Learning activities
The students worked in groups of five, with team leaders identified during the group selection phase. These team leaders negotiated on behalf of their group on aspects such as which theatre practitioner the group wanted to research. The students shared their research in class with the rest of their peers through Google Slides presentations. These presentations were then peer-assessed.

The students also received marks for their resource entries into the Google Forms database. These had to be reliable and suitable resources for academic work.

Assessment activities
In addition to using Google Forms as an early assessment task, an additional Google Form was used as a peer-assessment tool. This Google Form was designed to be accessible on laptops, tablets and mobile phones connected to the WiFi network in the lecture venue. Through user-friendly dropdown tabs and linear scale inputs, the students could actively assign grades in class to various aspects of their peers' presentations.

Enhancing student collaboration through a Google suite
Faculty of Arts | Department of Drama

Module: Theatre Arts 178
Lecturer: Dr Rufus Swart rswart@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Advisor: Dr Faiq Waghid faiq@sun.ac.za

Technical Presentation - First Presentation Peer Assessment Form

Please answer the questions about one of the presenters

*Required

What's your name? *

What's the name of the student you are reviewing? *

Body language / Eye contact

How was his/her posture? *
(Tick one or more)
☐ Too much to one side
☐ Nice and straight
☐ Too stiff
☐ Relaxed
☐ Too relaxed

What about the hands? *
(Tick one or more)
☐ In your pockets
☐ Playing with a pen/pointer
☐ Folded together behind your back or in front of you
☐ Making appropriate gestures
☐ Moving too much

Figure 1: Screenshot of how a peer-assessment tool can look on a mobile device

Feedback practices
The students received feedback during their presentations from both the lecturer and their peers. The marks assigned by the peers were anonymous.

Learning environment
Collaborative setting
The students worked in groups of five. Previously, students had worked individually but the lecturer was then unable to get through all the theory.

Working in their groups, each group identified a group leader. The Google Slides activity logs, together with its communication capabilities, ensured that the research presentations reflected the work done by each member in each group.

Content resources
Before the students proceeded with their research, the lecturer ensured that they could navigate and filter internet-based resources, cognisant of the fact that they might not be as competent as they should be at filtering the comprehensive information at their disposal. To facilitate this, the students were provided with notes on each practitioner and referred to resources in the library; the Faculty librarian also presented workshops during class times. To gauge the effectiveness of these workshops in ensuring that the students' work would be of high quality, the Faculty librarian and the lecturer created an assessment task that required the students to identify and list credible internet-based resources. The assessment was done through Google Forms, an application of the Google collaboration suite. This was introduced with relative ease and integrated directly into the learning management system, SUNLearn. Traditionally, Google Forms is used to initiate online surveys but it is now gradually being used as a viable assessment tool. In this instance, a Google form was used to ensure that the students' data inputs would be efficiently archived so that constructive feedback could be provided.

Enhancing student collaboration through a Google suite
Faculty of Arts | Department of Drama

3

Module: Theatre Arts 178
Lecturer: Dr Rufus Swart rswart@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Advisor: Dr Faiq Waghid faiq@sun.ac.za

Technology resources

Given that the students were required to collaborate on their group presentations, the lecturer needed to ensure that they would not be hampered by logistical issues with regard to time and location. The students therefore used Google Slides. As mentioned earlier, Google Slides, which forms part of the Google collaboration suite, is a free presentation-creating tool, sharing features with many high-end tools, such as Microsoft Office Suite. It has a low learning curve and, unlike Microsoft Office, affords the students opportunities to collaborate seamlessly on a single presentation both synchronously and asynchronously, using any device. Google Slides also has a number of communication capabilities, such as a chat feature and interactive tracking. Google Slides furthermore provides users with detailed activity logs, which, in this case, was used to monitor student activity as they created their slides.

Student experience
Student feedback on the learning experience

The peer-assessment tool produced an overwhelmingly positive response from the students. They could complete the peer-assessment forms by accessing the lecture venue through a dedicated hotspot provided by IT on their devices concomitantly with the students presenting their substantive, well-researched endeavours.

General
Opportunities

Through the adoption of a blended learning approach, the lecturer felt that he could cover a wider range of content than through a traditional pedagogical approach. He could also make learning more playful and insightful for his learners. The students became increasingly adventurous over the weeks as they presented their works, augmenting their presentations with audio and visual enhancements, such as sound effects and videos. They were taking responsibility for their own learning by searching the internet to produce rich presentations from which their peers could benefit.

Reference list

Laurillard, D. 2012. Teaching as a design science: *Building pedagogical patters for learning and technology.* New York: Routledge.