

## Reflective practice and the element of surprise in technology enhanced learning

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### Abstract

This is a concept paper which draws attention to the element of ‘surprise’ when it comes to educators’ self-reflections and which I apply to my own experience of implementing new forms of pedagogy in relation to technology and enhanced learning. The idea that the experience of “surprise” or “encounter with strangeness” leads us to a conversation with the ‘other’, that in turn forces a change of habits, is an essential part of self-reflective practice according to Pollard (2008:402). In citing Charles Sanders Peirce (1955) and his notion that “experience is not personally owned but rather a conversation between the self and that which is not-yet known”, Pollard suggests that this can result in “different techniques of teaching, which are then open to further interpretation” (2008:403).

My own experience involving an element of surprise occurred in 2021 when I tasked a class of my second-year undergraduate students with the assignment of creating a digital artefact of their choice. My objective was to help students develop their digital skills and to become more aware of the multiple modes of communication available to them. The artefacts could be a short 5-minute YouTube video, a podcast, a pecha kucha presentation, or an online game, and the students were asked to communicate a message on a topic that was important to them. Examples I suggested were climate change, sustainability, the #metoo or #BlackLivesMatters movements, or the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, two unexpected outcomes occurred where I encountered ‘surprise’ (Pollard, 2008) which led me to a conversation with the ‘other’ – sometimes referred to as a “strange intruder” (Peirce, 1960: 38). First, rather than highlighting world problems or social issues on a large scale, many of the students chose to relate their own, very personally-revealing stories dealing with topics such as depression, anxiety, suicide, health issues and toxic relationships. Second, in providing feedback on their experience of this assignment, several students further surprised me by stating that while they were unsure about creating a digital artefact – something they had not done previously. Telling their own stories in a creative way, particularly when they learned they did not need to present it to the rest of the class, they found to be cathartic and personally beneficial.

As a result of being surprised, and in conversation with this “strange intruder” that challenged my teaching, I realised that the response to this assignment was illustrative to me and to other educators that technology-enhanced learning goes far beyond the technology in what it can achieve, and in meeting the needs of students. Noting this experience assists me in understanding how students themselves can be instrumental and collaborative in the on-going development of a paper. It also reinforces that self-reflection should always be an essential practice for educators in developing their teaching practice, no matter their level of experience.

### References

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