

## Digital Identity Video 2: Helen Beetham

### What is digital identity?

I think this morning I talked about digital identity as being both resources, things that we gather, artefacts we create and things that we gather from our virtual interactions to use in various ways to pursue our own aims and purposes as learners, as teachers, in our life. It has that function of being a resource, a set of resources that we can deploy, but it is also the work we do on those resources. It's the work we do to curate and narrate who we are around those resources to make sense of them. I guess it's the work we do of sharing them in certain ways. So then, for me, digital identity both has that very kind of rational and worked sense of who I am presenting right now to you, who I'm presenting to particular social groups that I interact with online but it also has, as I was implying this morning, a kind of slightly uncanny resonance because there are aspects of our identity that are not in our control – that are taken from data that's out there about us that we can't necessarily reclaim or repurpose. It's taken from what other groups of people choose to recognise in what we're presenting to them. So I think that social identity online has those different kinds of components. It's a bit like light that's both a particle and a wave – it's a resource, but it's also the work we do on it. It's a constant piece of work and it's something we can rationally bring – it's a kind of ego work if you like and at the same time as we were talking about this morning, it has that, not necessarily a shadow side, because it can also be productive – there can be serendipity to the unknown and to the unconscious on the web but it has that side which is out of our control that constantly slips beyond our reach into the spaces we enter and through the data that we shed every time we go online whether we want to or not.

### How does it impact lecturers to engage academically in digital spaces?

I think the impact is very different for staff and students so, certainly when I started talking to academic staff about how they felt about their digital identity and particularly talking to staff who are in some sense digital scholars, open scholars, why they do that, why they engage, there was a real sense of fun, their passion for the subject of their desire to be seen online, so to share their content with more students, to share their ideas more broadly and you know certainly there were ego rewards but there were not financial rewards and the reputational rewards were kind of there, things that they could play with. There was a real desire to do

that among a small cadre of academics who were entering that space and Martin Weller has written about those benefits – the community benefits, the personal benefits of sharing ideas, of being a thoughtful person in a digital space.

My impression is in recent years that a lot of what academics do with their online identities has become the subject of scrutiny and mandate and a certain sense of guilt or of requirement, so you have to keep your academic publications up to date, you have to keep your departmental web page looking good, account for any research funding you've been given and so there's a sense in which that kind of work, sometimes that work can be a burden, but sometimes it can be a kind of joy and as with our students, where our identity is concerned, we're very highly motivated and that motivation is positive when we're motivated by pride – kind of ego rewards – but it can be negative by shame, guilt or other kinds of requirement and I think we were also saying in discussion this morning that we have to be careful that we use that motivation to do identity work or we make that motivation a positive thing as it can be the academic space.

### **How does it impact learners?**

I think for learners, and I don't want to caricature learners – for those learners that are digitally engaged and have a very active social life online, the issues are perhaps different and for those learners, it may be that they just simply don't perceive the academic space as one where they can have an identity that they can play with. They're so busy trying to just meet the requirements that we set upon them, trying to understand what our criteria of judgement are in the academic space that they don't feel able to play, and that's true in all kinds of ways; you know learners often struggle to take a stand when we ask them to argue a particular point because they don't feel confident to take up an academic identity and that's equally true online and as we were saying this morning when we were talking about this, how can we model to students positive ways of standing in an academic place to engage digitally – of positive ways of putting their point of view, of collecting material which has academic value and saying that it's theirs, and all of those are kind of complex issues for learners navigating the academics space for a first-time or a professional space – it might be their subject area space and yet it's often not the digital technology or digital interface that is the challenge for them – that's for many of them very comfortable. It's the different criteria of judgement that are going to be placed on them in those spaces.