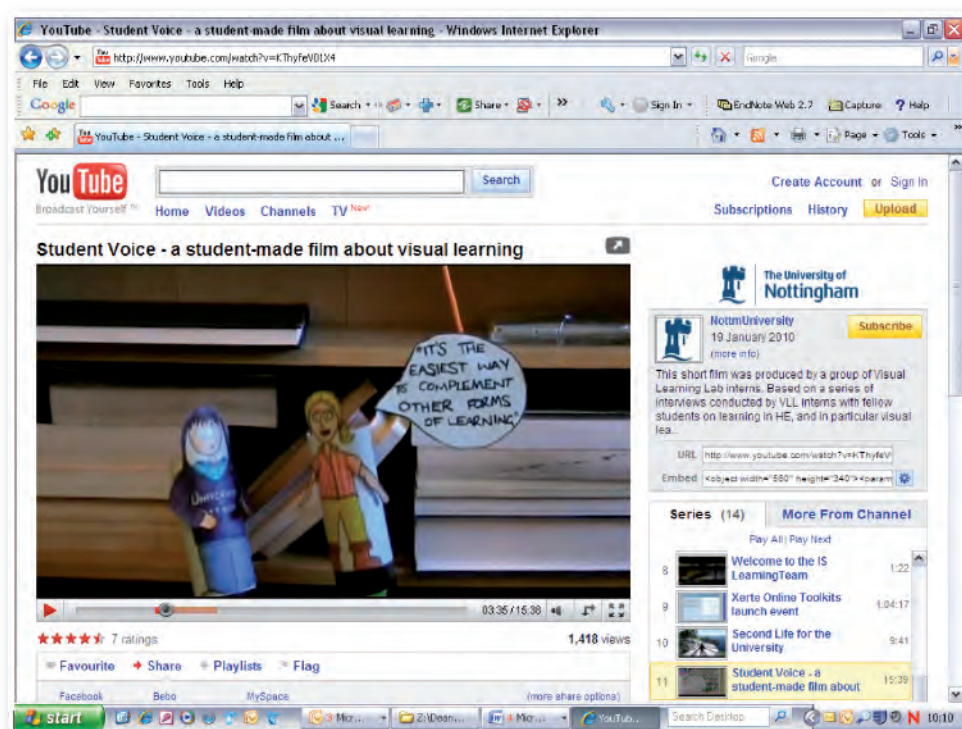


“Seeing something, watching somebody doing something, and then doing it”

How VLL interns used peer-led focus groups to hear the ‘real’ student voice – and how the results are a big hit on You Tube!



“ It’s the easiest way to complement other forms of learning ”

What do students think?

How do you find out what students really think about something? Traditionally, when the University wants to know what students think, they present them with a questionnaire. There might be boxes to tick, and some open questions where you can (but rarely do!) write down some more considered responses to the issue. The Visual Learning Lab interns decided to use their unique position as both students and educators to get close to the student voice and to find out their ‘real’ views on visual learning. The resulting short video, available to view at www.youtube.com/watch?v=KThyfeV0IX4 is a hugely valuable insight into what students think visual learning is,

how they feel it can be used well (and not so well!) and their suggestions for how it could improve some of the teaching they receive.

Peer-led Focus Groups

The VLL interns ran a series of focus-groups across the University. They designed them to be informal and enjoyable, and although they were voluntary, offered incentives in the form of a free lunch and an Amazon voucher. They felt that this was justified because it encouraged the students to spend the time and mental energy that they might not otherwise have done to engage fully with the questions raised. VLL interns Ellie Stone and Terry Black explain:



"It made the participants far more willing to spend time really thinking about their learning experience and the feedback that they were providing – certainly more than the level of consideration that often goes into completing a form at the end of a seminar, when everyone just wants to leave. This may sound cynical, but it is important to be realistic about the student mindset. As well as being voluntary, the focus groups were also mostly conducted in an informal fashion; by having the groups conducted by students (that is the VLL interns) participants were more comfortable, and thus more able to voice their honest opinions than they might be when addressing staff or academics".

The interns were also enthusiastic about the impact that their student-status had on the focus groups. They felt that getting students to run student focus groups was more efficient at accessing their peers' opinions.

"While the module evaluation form does ask students what they think, it asks the questions that staff think need to be asked, whereas the format we employed stimulated something more like a dialogue. There is added value in the sense that the focus groups show the questions that students think need to be addressed (in the nature of the questions the interns put together) as well as their responses to those issues; in some ways the questions we selected are as telling as the answers. The questions were used more as prompts to facilitate discussion rather than loaded and designed to receive a specific response. This gave scope for students to express any other issues that they thought were important that we hadn't considered."

Using the information

Rather than just writing a report about the outcomes of the focus groups, the VLL interns made a video. As preparation for video production, the interviews were discussed and analysed by all the VLL Interns. This group analysis then led to the creation of a storyboard for producing the Interns' video. "All content was created by students and includes a selection of direct quotes from the focus groups – it is the student voice with no abridgement, no embellishments and no restrictions". To be entertained and enlightened in equal measure on the question 'What is Visual Learning,' visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=KThyfeV01X4

The video has been presented and used in a series of workshops at the University of Nottingham and at conferences. Whilst the audiences do not necessarily agree with all the findings, the video is a helpful and entertaining trigger for presenting some student's perspectives on (visual) learning at the University of Nottingham.

VLL Director Professor Roger Murphy has commented "This student produced video is among the most unusual and interesting products from the work of the VLL. It contains some powerful messages about what students like and don't like about the teaching they experience here at the University of Nottingham. Because the video was produced by students to convey messages that had come from their fellow students it has great authenticity. I hope that it will be viewed widely throughout the University. If it is, it will I am sure, make many people sit up and think differently about how they go about their teaching."

Video Competition: 'The Student Experience at the University of Nottingham'



The Visual Learning Lab CETL has just completed the first ever student video competition across all University of Nottingham campuses. The aim of the competition was to promote the wider use of visual learning through encouraging students to develop the creative and technical skills involved in video production. It also involved personal reflection upon student learning experiences.

The VLL coordinated all aspects of the competition from September to December 2009 using the VLL Student Interns to offer guidance and support. Entry for the competition had to be in before Christmas 2009 and in the event we were delighted to receive a good number of entries from University of Nottingham students including some from the Malaysia and China campuses. These entries represented a variety of images of student life and they are currently being judged on their creativity and overall quality.

There are several prizes, including one of £1,000 for the best entries. Further publicity about the prize winners will be released in March.

The Visual Learning Lab team would like to thank everyone who helped with the planning and marketing of this event and is hoping that a similar competition will be repeated in future years.