

Engaging learners through video-making in the School of Geography

Professor Michèle Clarke from the School of Geography discusses the teaching and learning benefits from the use of video-making as a form of assessment.



Professor Michèle Clarke

Michèle joined the University of Nottingham in 1998 and is currently

Professor of Environmental Change. Her cross-disciplinary research interests include Quaternary environmental change, geomorphology and earth surface process dynamics, geochronology and biogeography. Her academic career reflects the multidisciplinary nature of her interests and she has worked in Schools of Chemistry & Molecular Sciences, Physics & Astronomy, Earth Sciences, Cultural & Community Studies and Geography.

What was the teaching and learning challenge that you sought to address?

I don't think the way we organise assessments is as engaging as it could be. If students are

enjoying themselves, there are going to be all sorts of added benefits: they put more effort in than they would normally, and the output is great. My work was aimed at enhancing the potential of video-technology for helping students learn. We had some equipment on campus which allowed students to film their own videos, but you couldn't edit them. Students would use them, they'd have great fun using them, but the output would often be poor in comparison to the effort they had put into it.

Before we invested in this equipment, there was one student-access edit suite at the University, available through Information Services (IS). I found out about it through some students who had contacted IS and travelled over to Kings Meadow Campus (KMC). News of the facility travelled, and in the end the demand was such that IS contacted me and said 'we clearly have a need here, what can we do to help?' They were really supportive, but clearly with only one facility for a growing number of students it soon became clear that we reached capacity very easily. The students *loved* it.

The grant that I had from the Visual Learning Lab was for increasing the capital

infrastructure to allow more facilities for students to do their own video-production. It has been very successful. Too successful in a way! Other Schools have come on board and now we are almost at capacity again: Nursing, Film & Television Studies and Chemistry have all engaged with video in slightly different contexts.

Why do you think video is a particularly good form of assessment?

Well, they have to think more carefully about how to present information. When you are presenting something visually,



Still from student video submission

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you are using different tools to get to your audience. The structure and design of how to share information and the visual processes around that are something that they haven't necessarily engaged with before, but are implicit in using this kind of assessment: It develops their visual and technical literacy. They like it because they feel they are being rewarded for the effort they have put in. I find that even when they get into the third year, they come back to me and say 'Can I have a copy of my video, cos I want to show it to my mates'. They are so proud of it! When they graduate, it is one of the things they remember doing from the entire course. It is different. If I could think of new and other ways to engage with that kind of creativity and enthusiasm, it would be great!

The good thing about video as a form of assessment is that you can see how much effort goes in. This means that if you are lazy,



Still from student video submission

it really shows! And the process of getting into groups and collaborating together develops a sense of peer competition. Once all the videos have been submitted, I book out a room and we all sit down together and watch them as a group. The students are very critical. 'That wasn't really very good because...'. And the ones they think are great they go 'Wow! Wasn't that great! I wish we had done that!' So they share their experiences in a way you would never get with an essay: It's real added value in all sorts of different ways. This is why I've been doing it for a number of years and, even with the timetabling problems and difficulties with accessing the facilities, I still pursue it.

Do the students appreciate the opportunity to develop these transferable skills?

Absolutely. After you have left University, how often do you write an essay? Critical thinking and writing skills are important, but the ability to be able to use video and think about presentation skills in a wider context is something that is transferable across all sorts of avenues and employment sectors. Receiving training on something that is professionally accredited gives them an extra point on their CV that they would not otherwise have. And I know they value it. The feedback shows that.

It is all about teamwork too and this helps them learn other employability and life skills: delegating responsibilities, diplomacy skills,

negotiating. They have to sort all these issues out as a group in order to succeed.

Apart from the fact that the facilities are once again at capacity, in what other ways can you gauge the impact and success of this VLL investment?

The quality of assessments I get improves every year, as students put more and more effort into it. I am getting submissions that are astoundingly professional in the way they have been produced. And this means that they do very well in the module. The implicit assumption is that I am being too generous with the marks, whereas actually what is happening is that the students are putting much more effort into it, and doing better as a result. I consider that to be a great indicator of success.



Still from student video submission

It sounds like a huge investment of time and effort for you. Do you enjoy it?

I'm lucky as I'm in a School where teaching innovation is very well supported. Word goes round. I have my colleagues come down and say to me 'I've just had students raving about your course so I thought I would pass that on'. There is a huge benefit from doing this kind of thing on a personal level as it makes the teaching process so much fun, and so rewarding. And what is a University if it is not about teaching?
I do it because I love it! I enjoy the creativity. This is why I am currently going down a lecture-capture route. I have been awarded funding from the Capital Investment Fund (CIF) to take video a bit further. And I did that because I thought 'Wouldn't that be great?' So yes, on a personal level I get a lot out of it.

What have you learned and what future plans do you have?

What is really interesting about this is that it is really student-based, but no staff have yet engaged with it: there are no facilities for staff to do the training. I'd like to see staff involved. There are things we could do as academics with video-editing that could be really great. Staff-training would also allow us to understand the processes that our students are employing in a more comprehensive way.
We have also been talking about developing some e-learning training packages for students so that they don't have to go over to Kings Meadow Campus. They could learn online and then use the equipment here on University Park. I think there are some really exciting future developments that could grow out of this investment. So I would see where the project has got to so far as a first step on a path of increased use of different media in learning and assessment. Watch this space!

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Selected stills from a range of student video submissions