

Capturing Placement Learning on Film

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Context

Discipline/Course/Subject area: Real Estate Degree Programme/Professional Development

Institution: Sheffield Hallam University

Impact: The practice was introduced:

- within a course unit/module
- across a degree programme/s

Length of time project has been running: one year

No. of students: 35

Level/Year of students: Level 6/year 4

No. of staff involved: 1 + technical support

Summary of Case Study:

Having completed a year of professional training, the Real Estate undergraduates are required to produce a short film capturing elements of what they learnt from placement for use in:

- 1) Reflecting on and sharing their learning,
- 2) Promoting the course and the placement experience, and
- 3) Informing students preparing to go on placement.

Key Words:

Employability, Group Work, Reflective Learning, Multi-media, Placement, Presentation Skills, Real Estate

Key Points of Good Practice

- This project is an opportunity for students to be creative in their expression of what they learnt on placement.
- Credit is given to the placement learning experience based on innovative presentation of evidence.
- Digital fluency skills are enhanced by drawing together multi-media sources (still and moving images, music, voice-over and text) into a single project file.
- It is an intense group work project that requires co-operation throughout the entire process. It is not a collection of individual parts put together to make a whole.
- Students are provided with a unique opportunity to share their placement experiences, not just within their project group but amongst the whole cohort via a 'showcase' event.
- Students' oral presentation skills are developed to the point of being confident to speak professionally to camera.

Description of Implementation

Delivered in the first eight weeks of semester two, this project comprises half of the assessment of a 20 credit level 6 module based on placement learning experiences. This is achieved via the presentation of case studies in semester one and this digital media project in semester two. The first three sessions are two hour blocks with the whole group. Subsequent sessions are run on a drop-in consultation/surgery basis. The initial briefing session is devoted to introducing the concept, explaining the rationale, spelling out the process and timetable, explaining the criteria for assessment, and brainstorming. For this latter activity, students are initially grouped into areas of placement expertise. For Real Estate students these areas of common interest may be based on, for example: property sectors such as retail, industrial, office, residential, leisure or development land, or on property issues such as disposal, acquisition, valuation, development, management, rating or rent review. Jigsaw groups are established, based on these areas of expertise. The jigsaw approach, developed by Elliot Aronson (see <http://www.jigsaw.org/>), encourages co-operation, learning from each other and a safe environment to test and share ideas before feeding back in a plenary session. All ideas are summarised on 'post-it' notes and displayed, and these are typed up and distributed electronically for further consideration. The ideas they decide upon need to have regard to the assessment criteria, i.e.

1. Is the real estate issue well chosen and clearly defined?

2. Is the presentation effective as a teaching tool?
3. How well has the potential of the media been exploited?

These criteria are designed to enable a balanced but flexible approach to awarding grades, so that account can be taken of the relevance of their chosen topic, their ability to communicate their ideas, and their skill in using digital media.

Students are given a further week to self-select their groups within prescribed guidelines (between four and six per group, each group to contain a mix of digital media skills). In this project the tutor reserved the right to modify groups. This may be necessary for judicious placing of certain students or to ensure a fair skills mix between groups based on who has prior experience of such projects.

Session two is a workshop dedicated to the planning and implementation of the filming process. Clearly it requires specialist support. Students have the conformed language, or grammar, of television explained to them, they witness a variety of interviewing techniques, and they have an opportunity to work on a storyboard.

The third session also requires specialist support to demonstrate the potential of the digital media software and how to use it. Windows Movie Maker was the software of choice for this project, mainly because it is so accessible to the majority of people. This session deals with all the technical issues of editing, adding effects and transitions, adding music and narration, adding titles and text, and managing the project folder so that work is not lost.

By this stage groups have formed and have their own ideas about the direction of their project. This is the time to exercise editorial control and send strong messages regarding what is or is not acceptable. If the students are to be allowed to develop their own theme, they need to know whether they are applying their efforts appropriately. The alternative is to allocate themes, which I think detracts from the creativity of the exercise and may not accurately reflect their placement learning experiences.

Regular surgeries and on-line help supports the rest of the project period. The showcase event is scheduled after the submission deadline, and this is where peer assessment takes place. Detailed feedback can be provided via Blackboard.

[See examples of student projects](#)

Perceived Benefits

For Students...

- Opportunity to engage with digital technology and acquire new skills. Their enhanced digital fluency is a key transferable skill that improves their

employability. It provides them with a source of evidence of skills when in interview. They also feel better equipped to evaluate film.

- Opportunity to be more creative than the norm. It makes a change from having to write an essay or report.
- The showcase event became a celebration of their achievements as well as a chance to see each other's work and learn from it.
- They value the opportunity to be involved in the assessment process, and this reinforces their understanding of the need to satisfy the stated assessment criteria.
- The intense nature of this group project creates a situation where skills are developed such as delegating, managing, conflict-resolution and negotiation.
- Students find it a fun project to engage with, they are extremely well motivated to demonstrate their placement learning on film, and they are proud of their achievements (evidenced by demonstrating this work to their friends and relatives and broadcasting on sites such as YouTube).

For Teaching/Support Staff...

- For the academic lead tutor there is considerable staff development for anyone not familiar with the technology, and for the support staff this is an opportunity to work closely with the students and discover more of the context of their course.
- The constructivist approach in this project is a challenge compared to the didactic approach of traditional lectures and tutorials.
- The project produces outcomes in the form of learning resources that can be used to inform students preparing for placement or to inspire new entrants to the course.
- There is satisfaction in releasing students into a project that requires hard work and commitment, yet is fun and produces an outcome they can be proud of.

Issues/Challenges for Students

Although this project was greeted with much enthusiasm, students soon realised they would have to operate out of their comfort zone. According to the feedback, some students resented the prospect of having to get to grips with digital technology, handling cameras, performing to camera, managing movie making software, being creative in developing ideas, storyboarding, performing in a time-constrained group exercise to produce a good quality short film that would count towards their final degree classification in Real Estate. Clearly it is a different type of assessment and

some students felt threatened by it.

Some groups needed more support than others in terms of developing their ideas and producing appropriate visualisations to get their point across. This included negotiating access to filming locations. Also it was important to make technical support readily available to them, especially at the editing stage.

Issues Challenges for Teaching/Support Staff

To take a group of non-media students and expect them to produce high quality short films in eight weeks from introduction to completion would be naïve. Consequently there needs to be focus on the essential elements in the taught sessions, plenty of support given in the surgery sessions, and trust in the students...that they will treat the equipment with respect and give a good account of themselves in their film.

Flexibility is required in the assessment process to ensure that groups that satisfy the assessment criteria but whose camera and editing skills let them down are not unduly penalised.

There is no time to allow groups to falter, so the tutor needs to closely monitor group progress throughout the project period.

It was decided that students should submit their work via the Assignment Handler on their module Blackboard site. This was to allow unlimited access to the work without having to handle a mixture of CDs, DVDs, flash drives and large email attachments. However, Assignment Handler has to be primed to accept group work and the maximum file size that it will accept needs increasing because the project files are likely to be between 100 and 200 megabytes each (for a film up to 10 minutes long).

In the event of student failure, thought has to be given to the nature of any referral. Rather than ask an individual student to resubmit the entire project it is probably sufficient to require the submission of a storyboard detailing the structure of a newly conceived response to the project brief.

Enablers that helped the project to work

The main enabler was having access to high quality expert technical input. Both Keith Radley (Senior Lecturer in Curriculum Innovation, LTI, SHU) and Tom Figures (Senior Technician, Faculty of Development and Society, SHU) were committed to the project and provided support throughout.

By inviting staff and second year students to the showcase event, and gathering formal feedback from them as well as the cohort, greater certainty and consistency in assessment was achieved.

Details of project evaluation

Project evaluation took the form of filmed group interviews after the showcase event as well as completion of feedback forms which invited the students to respond with three points under each heading of Stop, Start and Continue. This form of feedback encouraged the students to reflect and provide qualitative feedback on what they regarded as the priorities. The positive benefits listed above were all reinforced. A significant issue which the students were keen to convey was that the editing process is extremely time consuming for them as novices and some questioned why they had to engage in such a project when they could have been learning something more useful! Further evaluation was carried out in a filmed interview of the lead tutor which formed part of the wider evaluation of Sheffield Hallam University's Inspirational Learning initiative led by Keith Radley. His findings were presented at the SHU Faculty of ACES LTA conference, June 2009. My own evaluation was presented in the Reflections on Placement paper presented at the SHU E3i CETL conference in May 2009.

Possible improvements/enhancements

Students can be alerted to the prospect of this final year project whilst they are on placement, and encouraged to capture digital images (still, or moving), or even sound, representing their work experiences. These can then be incorporated into the project to add realism and variety.

In the first run of this project, only two of the six groups addressed specific Real Estate issues. The rest were of a more general nature reflecting on transferable skills, although still containing relevant Real Estate material. Greater editorial control would ensure the capture of more material that is specifically Real Estate related.

Points of advice for others who may wish to replicate the techniques used

Make sure that technical support is in place.

Decide in advance, and be very clear about how the work is to be submitted.

Avoid clashing with other submission deadlines.

Decide how much editorial control you want to exercise. Be prepared to intervene in any group that appears to be going off at a tangent.

Use the showcase event as a celebration of achievements.

FURTHER READING

Relevant publications by those conducting the case-study:

Bramhall, M., Radley, K. & Metcalf, J. (2008) Users as producers: students using video to develop learner autonomy. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Innovation, Good Practice and Research in Engineering Education*, July 2008 held at Loughborough University. Available at <http://www.engsc.ac.uk/downloads/scholarart/ee2008/p057-bramhall.pdf> [Accessed 23rd September 2009].

Jones, I. (2009) Reflections on placement. *Proceedings of the May 2009 E3i CETL Conference on Student Perspectives on Employability* held at Sheffield Hallam University. Available from: <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/cetl/e3i/conference2009.html> [Accessed 12th November 2009].

Radley, K. & Bramhall, M. (2008) Promoting learner autonomy in Engineering. *Proceedings of the Ivan Moore Symposium*, January 2008 held at Loughborough University. Available from: http://www.engcetl.ac.uk/events/ivanmoore_jan08/ [Accessed 10th July 2009].

Radley, K. & Kirkwood, J. (2009) Inspirational learning - developing autonomous student learning through digital media production. *Proceedings of the iBEE Conference September 2009* held at Sheffield Hallam University. Available from: http://www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk/news/events/ibee2009/files/Radley&Kirkwood_SpeedDating.pdf [Accessed 30th October 2009].

Publications in the research literature:

Prensky, M. (2001) *Digital natives, digital immigrants*. [online] Available from: <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf> [Accessed 10 November 2009].

Cross references to other materials/resources in the topic area:

JISC Study into the Evolution of Working Practices (2008) *The Digital Fluency Initiative: Literacy For 21st Century*. Available from: <http://ewds.strath.ac.uk/work-with-it/CaseStudies/DigitalFluency.aspx> [Accessed 30th January 2009].

Martin, A. (2005) DigEuLit – a European framework for digital literacy: a progress report. *Journal of eLiteracy*, 2. Available from: http://www.jelit.org/65/01/JeLit_Paper_31.pdf [Accessed 11 November 2009].

The New Media Consortium and EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (2008): *The*

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Horizon Report. Available from: <http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2008-Horizon-Report.pdf>
[Accessed 12 November 2009].