

Pauline Ridley and Caroline Cash

‘Picture This: Using visual research methodology to explore how students engage with visual learning and assessment.’

This workshop was based on a project focusing upon the use of visual learning and assessment within the higher education environment. The speakers were keen to highlight how valuable – and, to date, under-utilised - this format is as a tool not only in the fields of art and design, from which it has predominantly evolved, but also within other disciplines. Such assessments use a range of formats, including short videos and posters, and offer a means by which assessment can be made based on a variety of skills rather than solely on the written form. The project has consciously sought to expand the use of visual research methodology as an actively taught and assessed medium. The speakers highlighted a range of uses of visual assessment, such as how feedback based on video footage of a presentation can promote learner development, and how students have generally responded favourably to their experience of this, despite perhaps having initial misgivings, especially in disciplines where this is a less traditional format.

Whilst the project is in its early stages the arguments for its development were convincing, and there was particularly interesting discussion regarding the application of this format in a multiplicity of disciplines. It was clear that those involved in progressing the project are still seeking to address issues including how to overcome students feeling threatened as they are moved away from traditional essay-writing format, particularly given the highly intrusive nature of recording such important events. Linked to Ron Barnett’s argument in the keynote speech, the speakers were keen to stress that this process of recording and subsequently utilising recorded material is a highly privileged experience and that this should be reflected when planning and implementing such a format. This promoted interesting debate around ethical issues which are inevitable challenges in such an undertaking. The speakers showed an example of the type of recorded footage being gathered to date, which demonstrated the value of such material regarding not just the verbal, but also – perhaps most interestingly – the non-verbal communication evident in such presentations.

A number of areas for future development have been identified based upon findings so far, such as the need to formulate advice for students as to how to prepare to present a project visually, as at the moment such advice is often limited and/or inappropriate to the topic or the student. Further guidance for assessors is also an area highlighted for development as they may be very eager to conduct such a process but not understand how to implement it effectively or how to develop adequate assessment criteria. Interestingly, the speakers asserted that fundamental to this is the development of visual *skills*, and how to use them within different disciplines and how students ought to annotate, record and analyse what they are looking at, and how to then subsequently present this in a suitable manner, which will inevitably require some strategising and creativity in terms of application across ‘new’ disciplines. There are therefore already some useful ideas and experiences emerging from the project, and it is clearly an area that requires a lot more research and development, which the project will hopefully to continue to lead the way in achieving.

Chair: Johanna Keenan