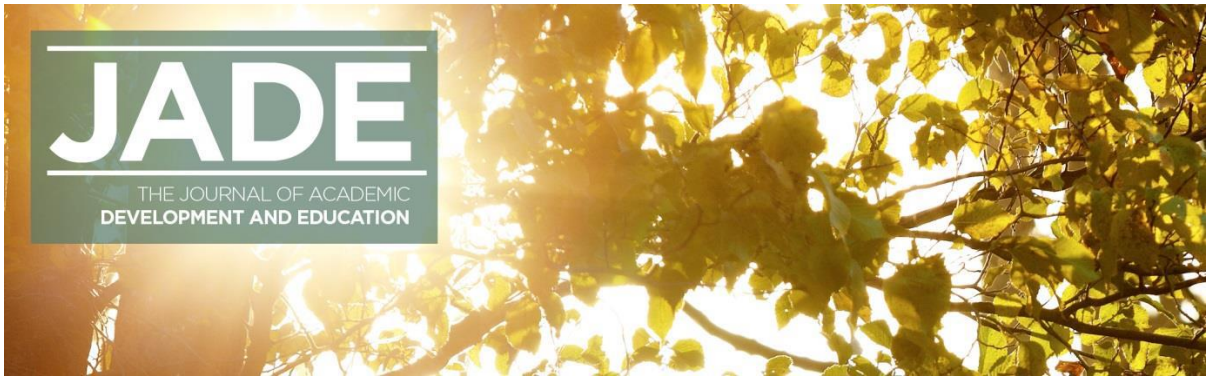

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Article:

Integrating Video Content into Humanities Teaching: a case study

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Integrating Video Content into Humanities Teaching: a case study

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Introduction:

Screencasts and other video content offer an innovative means of improving communication between tutors and students and addressing student concerns about limited contact hours, which can be particularly pressing in English Literature. Our students' comments make it clear they require further guidance and support, despite extensive feedback provided on written work and guidance provided in module handbooks. This likely results from the nature of the subject which foregrounds self-reflective learning and has fewer contact hours than science subjects. In the most recent NSS, 76% of Keele English students felt that 'the criteria used in marking have been clear in advance' and 81% felt they had 'received sufficient advice and guidance' (unistats.ac.uk). These percentages are much lower than other areas on the NSS (such as the 90% of Keele's English students who said 'staff have made the subject interesting', or the 100% who felt 'my course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth'). The impact of this communication gap between staff and students is felt more widely; only 57% of students responding to the most recent NSS said they 'feel part of a community of staff and students'.

This paper examines the use of video technology to supplement three areas of student learning: seminar preparation, assessment guidance, and assessment feedback. We prepared three informational videos to supplement a second-year English Literature module in order to explore the impact of this technology on student achievement, student feedback, and staff time and resources, to determine whether screencasts offer a feasible solution to the students' perception of a communication gap between students and tutors in the English programme.

Background

Researchers have investigated the use of screencasts primarily outside of the Humanities, including in mathematics (Lloyd & Robertson, 2012; Robinson, Loch & Croft, 2015) and the sciences (Cox, 2006; Winterbottom, 2007). Within the Humanities, screencasts have been investigated as a feedback tool (Anson, *et al*, 2016; Vincelette & Bostic, 2013; Ali, 2016) and a reference tool within the library sciences (Ergood, Padron, & Reber, 2012; Carr & Ly, 2009; Oud, 2009), but not as a supplement to class time, or as a means of assessment guidance. There is significant potential to embrace this technology within the Humanities, to improve communication and to expand limited classroom time.

Video content has been shown to have a number of advantages: the multimodal and interactive nature of the screencast increases active learning, aids retention of information, and is inclusive for those with learning difficulties. Scholars have demonstrated that adding visuals to text enhances student understanding (Angeli and Valanides, 2004). Multimedia presentations have been shown to increase both

retention and transfer of learning, or application of the material to a new situation (Mayer, 2005). The benefits of multimedia presentation in the classroom is grounded in cognitive load theory, which demonstrates that human's working memory (which is used to process new information) is extremely limited in capacity. Baddeley's (1992) working memory model posited that working memory consists of two subsystems: a visual/pictorial system and an auditory/verbal system. Sweller (2005) suggests that by engaging both systems, the processing power of the working memory is increased. Kolb's theory of learning suggests that interactivity is essential for 'active' and 'deep' learning to occur (Kolb, 1984). Oud has demonstrated that interactivity can be easily introduced into the screencast form, by posing questions during the cast or suggesting activities at the end of the cast (Oud, 2009). Control is another form of interactivity; within multimedia presentations, then, active learning is engaged through the viewer's control over pace, as they are allowed to pause, review, stop, and start the presentation (Oud, 2009).

Screencasts are available to students 24/7 and are easily accessible through mobile devices, offer control over the pace of learning, and engage both the visual/spatial and auditory/verbal channels of memory. Multimodal and interactive screencasts engage students across a variety of learning styles, and are inclusive for students with disabilities. Studies have suggested that they are ideal for students with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, or for students for whom English is not their first language (Ali, 2016). Inclusive teaching theory has emphasized the need for a 'holistic approach to inclusion' which focuses on all students and emphasizes 'multiple forms of participation' (Artiles, 2006, 68). Screencasts are well suited to this

holistic approach, as they engage students on several levels and are adapted for students with a variety of different learning styles.

Case Study

The study was undertaken in 2018 with a class of 54 students enrolled on a second-year undergraduate module, ENG-20034 Victorian Performances. We prepared three videos, addressing presentation guidance and feedback, seminar preparation, and exam preparation. Two of these videos focused on assessment, and were intended to address students' perception of inadequate communication. The third was intended to serve as a bridge between traditional lecture material, which considers historical and biographical context and models critical approaches to the text, and seminar activity, which is interactive, student led, and grounded in peer learning. This video was intended to supplement the two contact hours provided on the module each week.

We employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess this study. Before the start of the semester, we garnered students' opinions on assessment guidance and feedback via an anonymous survey sent to all 54 students. 38 students (70%) responded to the initial survey. 35% of these respondents felt they had not been given adequate assessment guidance during their first year of study. This perception was particularly pronounced in regards to formatting/referencing (47% of respondents felt they had not received adequate guidance in these areas) and rubric (37% felt this guidance was inadequate). The survey ended with an open text

question: ‘how could the guidance given on pieces of assessment be improved?’ 18 students provided answers here (33% of the overall cohort). The majority of responses focused on the need for more detailed feedback, revealing student perception that feedback is ‘vague’ or ‘unclear’. Responses demonstrated that students understand the pressures on tutors’ time, as some students suggested that this feedback could focus on common mistakes made across the cohort; this could very easily be provided in video form. Many of the responses highlighted the need for guidance earlier in the semester; even feedback given on the first assignment was seen to come too late for some students. Though extensive guidance is provided within module handbooks across the English programme, it is clear this is not seen as sufficient. Videos released early in the semester potentially could alleviate many of these concerns.

After the release of the first two videos, we conducted two focus group interviews. Invitations were sent via email to all students; ten students (18% of the cohort) accepted these invitations. The comments garnered from students in these interviews align with the previous research conducted on screencasts. Ali (2012) and Oud (2009) both note the advantage of video content over guidance provided in person (either in class time or office hours). Videos are available 24/7 and can be started, stopped, and re-watched. Our students, too, highlighted the benefits of control and accessibility, noting not only that videos were available whenever they want to watch them, but that they address a potential disability issue, as they allow students with mobility issues to get clarification on assignments without coming onto campus (though, of course, email also allows guidance at a distance). In line with the findings of Ali (2016) and Silva (2012), students praised the conversational tone of

the video, which made it feel ‘more one to one’, according to one student. In general, students reported a preference for video over written guidance. They felt the spoken word was easier to comprehend and to digest; the conversational tone made the guidance feel ‘more practical’ than that provided in the module handbook. They reported that they often used videos to aid revision at both GCSE and A-Level, and thus the format felt familiar and reliable. There was also a sense that watching a video ‘makes it feel like you’re not doing work’.

Perhaps most surprising, these students liked that the feedback provided in the video was not ‘overly personal’. Direct feedback (i.e. about their individual work) can be ‘disheartening’, and students reported, ‘I don’t want to remember it and shove it to one side’. The ‘common mistakes’ format of this first video felt more approachable because it could not be interpreted as a personal attack, even if the students found they *had* made many of mistakes covered in the video. This suggests that students might engage more readily with feedback provided through videos which address the whole cohort. This is important because on average only 50% (as recorded by Turnitin) of our English Literature students read the feedback provided on their submitted work. This is a waste of tutor time and prevents students from improving from assignment to assignment.

Students in the focus groups responded equally well to the seminar preparation video, which reviewed close reading practice (applicable to all modules on the programme) and set up the activity that would take place in that week’s seminar. This made the seminar more ‘efficient’, according to the students, and less daunting

because they knew what to expect in class. Again, control was highlighted as a benefit of the format; students felt they were able to get ‘quite detailed notes’ that ‘you would never be able to get in lecture’ because they had the ability to pause the video. The technology used (Camtasia 9) allowed us to demonstrate textual annotations on screen (circling, underlining, highlighting, etc). As Oud (2009) notes, ‘Teaching successfully with critical thinking in mind involves linking concrete skills and actions to a more conceptual framework’ (170). Neither lectures nor seminars are formatted to allow tutors to demonstrate concrete skills like annotation; videos may successfully fill that gap. The animations used to annotate also made the video more multimodal (beyond what can be accomplished with more simplistic screencasting software like Snagit), which was seen as a benefit. As one student reported, ‘I wasn’t expecting it to be so engaging.’ Again, the conversational tone of the video was praised; this suggests it is important to find a balance between the more academic tone usually adopted in lectures and the more relaxed tone often used in seminars. Hearing the voice of their own tutor seemed important to these students because it ‘feels like we have a connection with you’; ‘we’ve built a rapport with you’. It was this that made the video preferable to the many other offerings available on YouTube, covering skills like close reading, or providing analysis of texts such as *Daisy Miller* (as this video did). One surprise of this project was view count on these videos. While ‘Tips for a Successful In-Class Presentation’ and ‘Tips for Preparing for a Seen Examination’ have 53 and 69 views respectively (in line with the size of the cohort and the expectation that some students would not watch the videos, while others would watch multiple times), ‘Daisy Miller Seminar Preparation’ has 1,533 views to date. The video is clearly reaching people far beyond our own students.

Students appreciated that the videos were provided on a public platform like YouTube, because it requires no log in. Students reported that the online platform usually used, the Keele Learning Environment (KLE), is difficult to access on mobile phones (between 25% and 33% of students watched these videos on their phones), and more generally felt that information is difficult to find on the KLE. In contrast, these videos were very easy to find on YouTube; they were tagged with ‘Keele’ and the module code, but also could be found simply by searching for their tutor’s name. More widely, this suggests to us that we need to rethink the ways in which we distribute information to our students; in the past we have relied solely on the KLE (or information given verbally during class), but it was made clear during these interviews that much of this information never reaches our students. It is frustrating for tutors to realise that students do not read the information we provide them with, but knowing this, videos might be a way of addressing the problem, as it became clear to us that students simply prefer audio/visual presentation of information over the written form.

The seminar preparation video was further assessed by an anonymous survey distributed during class. 33 students responded (61% of the cohort). 84% of respondents found the video ‘clear’, 78% found it ‘specific’, 60% found it ‘engaging’, and 51% found it ‘personal’. In the focus group, students suggested ways of making the video content more engaging, including increasing interactivity by posing questions to students throughout the video. Camtasia allows creators to embed quizzes within videos (with results emailed directly to the creator) which is another avenue to explore in the future. The video covered a fair amount of ground, and thus we wanted to further assess how useful students found each component of the

video: lecture summary, seminar preparation, and guidance for an upcoming assignment. 70% of students reported that the video was useful as a summary of the lecture (which accounted for the first four minutes of content). 79% felt it was useful as preparation for the seminar activities. Only 42% felt the content was useful as guidance for their assignment. It is important to note that this aspect of the video was not addressed directly in the video, but in the description box on YouTube we suggested that the ‘application of David Lodge's comments on James's narrative style to a short extract should serve as a model for the Reflective Diary assessment’. However, in the focus group it became apparent that the students who watched the videos did not read the additional comments provided in the video description. It is important, therefore, to make sure that all important information appears within the video itself.

Findings

We have measured the success of this case study in the impact it had on a) staff time and resources, b) student feedback, and c) student achievement.

Each video took several hours of staff time to create: scripting, filming, editing, and enhancing (with animations and behaviours applied in Camtasia). However, our overall perception is that time was saved in the long run in the dramatic reduction of questions regarding the presentations and the exam. In previous years both pieces of assessment had caused significant anxiety amongst the students, resulting in a barrage of emails throughout the semester. Reducing our need to answer the same

question in 54 separate emails seems quite valuable, indeed. Being able to direct students who did query us about the assessment to a central resource that we felt confident they were actually likely to engage with (as compared to the written material provided in the handbook and on the KLE) was also a timesaver.

In the final module evaluation questionnaires, 79% of respondents reported that they had received sufficient guidance on assessment (rating this 4 or 5 on a 1-5 scale). This is a marginal increase from the previous year's cohort, in which the same question garnered 74% positive responses. We can account for the fact that this change was so small, perhaps, in the fact one out of three assessments on this module did not receive a dedicated video (the reflective diary, which was addressed, though only obliquely, in the seminar preparation video). Having provided this extra guidance on some pieces of assessment, it seems students felt more affronted at not receiving it on *all* pieces of assessment. This raises one potential red flag in the wider incorporation of video content: students may feel modules that do not use videos are unfairly withholding necessary support. There is the risk of moving to a model in which all tutors are *required* to use video.

Though the module questionnaire results and anecdotal evidence collected through face-to-face discussion with students suggest that the videos did alleviate some anxiety about assessment, the extra guidance failed to have as significant an impact on student achievement as we had hoped. In 2017/18, the median mark for the group presentation was 65%; it was also 65% in 2018/19. In 2017/18 the median mark for the seen exam was 60%; in 2018/19 it rose to 62%. This must be attributed,

in part, to student engagement. The presentation guidance video garnered 35 unique viewers, or 65% of the cohort, while the exam preparation video had 36 unique viewers, or 66% (analytics provided by YouTube). As the remaining 35% of students did not choose to engage with this extra content, they will not have received any benefits from it. However, though *average* marks did not significantly change, the strongest students (those who were more likely to engage with the video content) did improve. No overall first-class marks (70% or higher) were given on this module in 2017/18, but six students (11% of the cohort) earned first-class marks in 2018/19. Equally, the weaker students may also have benefitted; four students (8%) in 2017/18 received a third-class mark (lower than 50%) overall, while no students received a mark in this range in 2018/19.

Conclusion

Despite only seeing marginal improvement in average marks and student feedback, we continue to feel positively about the potential of video content, particularly in subject areas with limited contact hours. Student response during the focus groups was enormously favourable, and these students were necessarily those who had engaged most with the videos. The positive impact upon staff time should also not be ignored. This could be increased by sharing videos across the programme. A bank of videos which review the core skills of the subject (like annotation, close reading, research, referencing, etc.) would help to alleviate staff time pressures both in class and over email. Equally, producing videos that address forms of assessment more generally (e.g. presentations, reflective diaries, annotated bibliographies, etc) would both relieve burdens upon staff time, and would help students to apply skills

learned in one module to the other modules on their degree. We also believe there's further potential to supplement lecture and seminar time with video content. In the 2017/18 academic year, we used screencasts as part of a funded outreach project with Higher Horizons+. We found that the screencasts gave us the space to come up with more innovative and hands-on classroom activities, and believe this same benefit could be extended to our undergraduate students. On the whole we feel positively about the benefits of using videos, especially as a way of addressing the wider pressures upon staff resources being faced across the sector.

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