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CLIP CETL Fellowship Report Form

Name: Terry Finnigan/Diana Aronstam

Title of Project:

Visual Directions: an integrated approach to teaching and learning materials

Category of CLIP CETL Fellowship Innovation in Learning & Teaching Activities

Context

The focus of this fellowship was the production of a learning resource for students in relation to reflective writing and sketchbook development. Enabling students to become more independent in their learning in their first year was one of the main issues driving the project. In addition to this, we felt it important to make two of the central practices at an art & design university more explicit. We were also keen to be part of creating a central study skills resource available across the University, which does not exist at present. Against this background, we set out to develop materials that were created locally and collaboratively with both staff and students, to ensure that they were seen as meaningful and would have currency amongst the users. We were interested in this work as we both come from a learning development background and have spent many years supporting students on course. Research we carried out prior to the commencement of our fellowship indicated there are very few study support websites that focus on the visual and, more specifically, art and design practices.

What did you do?

We began by researching existing websites within art & design, in order to identify the type of support already available to students. We also identified key texts for use as references in the area of sketchbooks and reflective writing. At the same time, we discussed our project with key staff and invited a number of them to participate in the creation of the resource. Staff at ITDRU played an important role in advising us on how to go about developing it. We also explored a number of software packages that could be of use – principally Camtasia – and looked at embedding flash technology into the resource.

Following the research phase, with the support of the CLIP CETL video technician, we filmed and edited 19 video clips of staff and students talking about their sketchbook and reflective writing practices. These have now been published on *itunes*. We were able to include staff and students from other colleges which has given the resource a University-wide focus. We also jointly created two sets of written guidelines, one on reflective writing and the other on sketchbooks. These were created using flash, and for this we engaged the services of a flash designer. These both have a very visual focus and have been constructed to allow students to navigate with ease within them. In addition to addressing important issues about reflective writing and sketchbooks, examples of students' work have also been provided. The volume of text on each page is small. We felt this essential in ensuring that the resource was accessible to a wide range of students. The resource is now available on a university website, and in its final stages of completion.

www.arts.ac.uk/cetl/visual-directions

What did you find out?

- We discovered that there exist a range of approaches towards reflective writing and the creation of sketchbooks across the different disciplines within the University.
- We have deepened our understanding of art & design practices, from listening to staff and students talk about what they do; from studying a variety of examples of sketchbooks and reflective writing, and from the key texts that we researched.
- We have learnt that these two practices are interlinked, as they both involve reflection, and focus on the process and not the final product. They also involve making choices and editing what will be included. Essentially, the key is how students engage with ideas and develop their creativity as they become creative practitioners through their degrees.
- The power of the visual within presentations has had a big impact upon our thinking in relation to the development of learning resources. We have learnt how to use photos/images to create purely visual presentations that have a far greater impact on the audience. This has led to a deeper understanding about visual articulacy and how students need to develop their confidence in discussing their creative processes.
- We have established that this work does not need to be in a book - it can be captured visually. This is important as e-portfolios are becoming more popular.
- In creating the video clips of staff and students, we interviewed them, asking 3 key questions. Working closely with the video technician we have learnt how to undertake a successful interview, put people at ease, rehearse their points, and encourage them to be concise in their answers.
- The interview process has also allowed us to reflect on how important spaces for listening are within a busy working environment. The very act of listening intently to people talking about their creative practices allows them to unpack what they normally do, make these practices more explicit and it provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on their work.

Impact on learning and teaching:

What impact will this have on students' learning?

Once the website has been created and is fully accessible throughout the University, we hope this resource will have a substantial impact on students' learning. We are planning to make this available on all Blackboard sites by the end of October 2007, targeting first year UAL students. We feel access to these materials in the different formats will be a useful and interesting support to their learning. While some of the information is generic, students can navigate through what is available and make their own choices about what to use and develop for themselves. The student examples, we hope, will serve as a useful guide on to how to start developing their own style.

What can other people learn from this?

This learning resource could be a useful tool for teaching staff to discuss how they develop sketchbook and reflective writing skills with their students, and how they themselves as practitioners can share their own practices.

The process of producing video clips of staff and students talking about their ideas could be replicated in different areas such as student services, library services and marketing. Staff could also develop projects where students' evidence is in the form of video clips or podcasts.

Impact on the curriculum:

This resource can influence changes in the curriculum as it is about making processes explicit. This is a very important part of the first year experience. At the first dissemination event in June two staff members from other colleges (LCC and Camberwell) were keen to incorporate it into their revalidation process for next year.

At LCF we are using this resource extensively within the new 'Introduction to Undergraduate Study' unit. To optimise its potential value, it should be introduced to students along with a task to complete within the class time, so that they are encouraged by their tutors to use it.

Dissemination:

Internal events

- The Learning & Teaching day on Reflection at LCF in July 2007
- The University central Quality department's away day at the Fashion Retail Academy in September 2007
- CLIP CETL Conversations series October 2007
- Presentation at UAL Teaching and Learning Day January 16th 2008

External events

- Designs on elearning International conference September 2007
- Abstract submitted for NALN conference 2008
- Planned abstract for CLTAD conference April 2008

External Links

- The 17 video clips were published on *iTunes* at the start of July. These can be searched through sketchbooks or visual directions
- Planned link to ADM HEA funded sketchbook project January 2008
- Link on planned Teaching & learning University website

Evaluation:

Have you been able to evaluate the impact of the Fellowship?

Terry Finnigan:

The fellowship has had a clear impact on my knowledge and understanding around creative practices across the university. I have made more contacts with a range of students and staff and spent sometime reflecting on my own learning throughout the process. I am very interested in visual articulacy and how students express their ideas in a variety of ways.

The students who were involved in the creation of the resource have had a first look at the resources and their response has been overwhelmingly positive. We will be piloting the resource over the coming year and will have a number of focus groups to find out students views and how it can be developed.

Diana Aronstam:

The fellowship has provided me with an invaluable opportunity to develop my understanding of a fundamental design practice within the UAL curriculum. At the same time, it has helped me consolidate my knowledge about reflective writing, and sharpened my focus in teaching sessions on reflection. I have now had several opportunities to use the resource within the classroom, and it is clear to me that it brings something dynamic to what can be perceived as a mundane task to students, namely, the requirement to reflect on their own practice.

The making of the resource has also significantly developed my understanding of online technology, and heightened my awareness of how to work effectively with visuals. Feedback suggests so far that the design principles employed in the resource will provide students with a tool for learning that resonates strongly with the work they are doing in an art and design institution.

How will you/do you know that your fellowship has made a difference?

If students are introduced to this resource by their tutors and they use it as a reference tool, the standard of reflective writing and sketchbooks should improve.

The extent to which staff use it in their teaching will also provide us with evidence that it is effective.

We are currently running focus groups with students from a variety of courses in order to gauge the impact it is having on their thinking about sketchbooks and reflective writing practices.

New things that have emerged?

Are there any new things resulting from your fellowship? Did anything unexpected happen?

- We discovered, quite early on, just how linked the two areas of sketchbook and reflective writing are. This was not obvious at the outset.
- We found the opportunity to reflect on the process of interviewing staff and students to be of great value. We learnt a great deal about art and design practices and also about the power of providing people with spaces to talk about their individual practices.

What can others learn?

Does your experience or your discoveries through the fellowship have any lessons for others? What might be useful to your colleagues, the university, the sector?

- The value to be found in presenting both staff and student views. Having used the resource in a number of classroom sessions now, it is clear that students very much enjoy learning from their peers, and it would be useful for others to think about how to optimise this.
- The importance of collaboration with the resource as this encourages ownership and so there will be more likelihood of engaging with it after it is completed

Reflecting on the process

What were the issues for you in undertaking a fellowship?

This was a joint fellowship and it brought with its benefits as well as challenges. We have learnt a great deal about working on creating a learning resource with a colleague and the importance of showing mutual respect towards each others' contribution. We shared the workload, and through discussions and debates, have produced something we consider to be an excellent learning resource. Two heads are clearly better than one and more ideas have been created through this process. We also encouraged each other throughout the process and supported the work we were completing.

At times it was difficult to find the time to do complete all the tasks as there were many other demands on our time. In fact we did not complete all the things we had hoped to in one term.

Our plan was far too ambitious! We have carried on this term in our own time to complete the resource, as we have both been very committed to getting it finished.

Finding a place to do the work outside of our own work environment was of great help. We were lucky to arrange with ITRDU to spend some days in Catton St away from our day to day-working commitments, and this gave us the space to think and create new ideas

We both feel this fellowship was very successful and that we have created an excellent learning resource. Our next challenge will be to encourage students and staff to use it and incorporate it into their classroom practices over the coming year.

Terry Finnigan
Diana Aronstam

26/10/07