

Topic stream: A. Pedagogic research

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Practical Group Projects in Media Education – Strategies for Effective Learning

Abstract:

This paper is based on pedagogic research undertaken as part of the author's participation on PGCert TLHE at Edinburgh Napier which she completed in Autumn 2015. This study is framed as a scoping study for a more in depth research project into media production pedagogy, with a focus on group practical work. The research interrogates effective teaching and learning methods relating to group practical work within media production education. This is relevant for the broader teaching community within the School of Creative Industries at Edinburgh Napier and more generally across media education and media production education. The research also addresses issues relating to employability and work related learning which are core values of teaching and learning across further and higher education.

Higher education media production courses (such as BA Television, BA Film at Edinburgh Napier) are characterised by practical group production, where students typically work together as part of module assessments to make short programmes or films. This involves group work and practical activity where students are reliant on each other and the development of their own skills and knowledge. This approach to learning can be challenging for both students working in these groups and for teachers supervising and managing the logistics of practical production and assessment within the academy.

This paper is based on research examining the most effective strategies for teaching and learning in group practical media production projects in Higher Education and how can these be applied within the context film and media production courses at Edinburgh Napier University. The aims of the research are to a) examine practical group work and assessment within media production courses and b) to evaluate learning and teaching methods for group project assessments in media education, with attention to practice at Edinburgh Napier University.

The methodology chosen for this research combined both qualitative and quantitative methods. It has combined practice led research (O'Reilly, 2005) that draws on the researcher's role as a lecturer and practitioner in media education. It includes participant observation (Gobo and Belton, 2008) based on her experience leading group work projects with survey and analysis of undergraduate students who have been engaged in media practical group work projects during the academic year, 2014-2015. This has been contextualised with a literature review that has investigated the broader contexts of media education, group learning and group learning on practical projects within media education. The research data has been analysed within an interpretive framework (O'Reilly, 2005).

The research considers issues & literature surrounding group work in media education (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008) with a focus on project based and problem based learning (Hanney, 2013; Hanney and Savin-Baden, 2013). This includes Dewey's (1916) 'intelligent learning' and Kolb's (1984) theories of experiential learning. In examining strategies for effective group working the paper is concerned with aspects of group dynamics (LaPrairie,

2007) such as the 'lone wolf' (Barr, 2003) and 'social loafing' or 'free riding' (Aggarwal and O'Brien, 2008).

This paper reflects on the importance of group size, leadership and students' perceptions of the fairness of assessment as some of the contributing factors which are relevant to group dynamics. The research recognises the benefits of learning as part of a reflective, iterative and active cycle and the value of the learning experience linked to professional practice (Hanney, 2013). It suggests critical reflection throughout the course of group projects is a strong factor in enhancing positive group learning.