

UTEA Application Exemplar – Academic Teaching Excellence Award

The application (it should be no longer than 2,000 words)

I have worked in a full-time position at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) since the 1st September 2019 but have been a sessional member of staff since 2007. One of my own areas of interest in research is post-structuralism and the practical application of this theory; this has informed my use of technology as a tool for the exploration of different modes of representation through media. I have worked to bring a focus on the use of technology in the learning environment to enrich and support students and staff and to begin to develop strategies that could benefit the wider community. This supports the principles of CCCU's TEL Strategy; that blended learning will become a key part of curriculum delivery and be "...regarded equally to more traditional forms [of learning and teaching] in all regards..." (Ashraf & MacIver, 2017)

Since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown my Technology Enhanced Learning work has intensified, focusing on the use of technologies to inform learning, practice, research and student engagement.

I have always looked for the opportunity to increase student engagement through a blend of learning resources and tools; this is important in the area of film production, where the subject being studied is the very medium through which it can be delivered. Diane Carson points this out in her article about teaching film production, saying that film courses "...shout for visual examples. Nowhere is the absolute necessity of clear, coherent illustrations of stylistic and thematic elements more obvious than in production classes." (1995:83)

We are fortunate now to have access to a range of affordable and accessible technology that allows students not just to see examples, but to interact and model practice as they learn and engage. It is essential to utilise the technology that students already possess to support and further their understanding. I am interested particularly in the use of mobile technology (phones, small 'pocket' cameras etc.) as a format for film making, and how this could be used to combat the perceived 'disposable' or 'low-culture' nature of online film. It is important to model the style of film making that I wanted the students to explore, so I began creating resources that were accessible and filmed on 'everyday' technology and maintained a high standard of academic rigour.

Whilst assessment policies were being finalised, I offered students the opportunity to engage with filmmaking at home through a series of online Recap presentations and YouTube videos. I focused on home film making with a mobile phone, creating a camera obscura and creating a 6-second film. The presentations offered students a variety of options for creating their projects and I assumed no access to high-end technology. I made the presentations with a combination of talking heads, PowerPoint slides and online videos, ensuring that students had access to the content through audio-visual information and written text.

As a case study, the camera obscura (or darkened room) is a project that requires no specialist equipment to experience, only the ability to darken a room during daylight. This provides opportunities for those students who may not be able to engage online teaching. This experiment is able to demonstrate to students the basic physics involved in generating a projected moving image. By creating this projection students are able to access and understand the 'building blocks' of film; the darkened room becomes the camera, the hole cut in the blacked out material operates as the lens and aperture, and the light coming into the room forms the upside down moving image on the opposite wall; even without the technology required to capture a recording of the image the project has created learning opportunities.

In experiencing the camera obscura, a student is able to have a reference point for wider discussions about the nature of the re-presented film world; a philosophical debate that has its roots in the allegory of Plato's Cave (Republic, Book VII 375 BCE). The students are also able to challenge the ontology of film and photography, particularly Roland Barthes notion of 'passed in front' (film) or 'posed in front' (photography). (1980:78)

The camera obscura is *both film and photography* and this knowledge can support students in their understanding of their discipline as well as widen their opportunities for practical projects. This project is an example of the integration of my own post-structuralist research and provides opportunities for the practical implementation of non-binary models of theory. Other Recap presentations offer students the opportunity to engage with practical projects with a theoretical underpinning (see appendices). Students have found the blend of learning particularly useful; it is clear that the provision of written information and video presentations have supported a variety of learning styles.

The delivery of online content has provided the conditions for broader opportunities in assessment. Students submitting film projects were impeded in their work by the closure of the University and restriction of access to equipment and software. I have been responsible for designing and delivering assessment briefs that cater for a spectrum of students in terms of their access to, and understanding of, software and equipment. It was important that assessments simultaneously allowed those with access to software and equipment the opportunity to submit moving image projects, whilst offering students with limited access the conditions to succeed and submit meaningful projects that were comparable to the 'higher-tech' options. This is another example of the CCCU TEL principle; that blended learning should be regarded equally with more traditional forms. Students' work has been equally valued; the result of this has been the maximising of student success, a TEL outcome.

Rather than maintain the requirement for format of assessment (written, photographic, etc.), students were asked to give an account of their project using whichever tools were at their disposal. Examples were provided of effective outcomes in a variety of media and students were offered Blackboard Collaborate tutorials to discuss their projects with tutors. I created three YouTube video presentations on submitting work through the YouTube platform and provided both written and video instructions for the assessment brief. This approach has resulted in the submission of genuinely engaging projects that demonstrate clear understanding of the potential inherent in various media. Work has ranged from students filming themselves and offering on-screen examples of their written and drawn work, completed films, and outstanding written assignments. The assessments have offered students a flexible virtual learning environment where strengths can be encouraged; the process will also inform future curriculum development; both of these processes are key values of the Learning and Teaching strategy of CCCU.

The engagement and feedback from students have been positive and this has required flexibility in communication. Students have been encouraged to engage in a variety of ways such as online real time/recorded tutorials. There is evidence that the presentations and videos have been useful, in the analytics of the videos, but also in email responses from students – please see appendices for specific examples. One student commented, via an online Blackboard Tutorial on 17th April, that he was immensely grateful for the amount and variety of support that he was receiving and that it had been in sharp contrast to the anecdotal conversations he had with his friends who were attending other universities. I am interested in how effective this multi-platform

approach has been for students, both in terms of disseminating content and information, and the delivery of assessment outcomes. This is something that I want to develop in future teaching.

This flexibility of approach aligns with a Constructivist view of learning, where prior understanding and experience is important in the assimilation and acquisition of knowledge. Summarised by Pritchard (2017), the

...learning takes place when new information is built into and added onto an individual's current structure of knowledge, understanding and skills. We learn best when we actively construct our own understanding. (2017:37)

Students are able, with a wider range of media and outcomes available to them, to utilise existing skills to develop and express their new knowledge and understanding in a specific area. The accumulated knowledge that many students have of online moving image (platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, for example) allow them to use the best medium possible to express their ideas. Metacognition is also important, and the entire process of skill and knowledge assimilation should be made explicit to students undertaking this work. This allows me to utilise my research directly to benefit students; it is possible to consider the proliferation of meaning and opportunities through a post-structuralist approach, highlighting the construct of differences and boundaries in various media (Samson, 2019).

A theoretical underpinning is necessary to augment the practical skills that students are developing, so I provided Recap presentations and written notes that deal specifically with the skills of evaluative and reflective writing and integration of theory. I created a Recap presentation covering research strategies for reflective writing online – this gave the students information about the online CCCU library facilities and the effective use of e-journals, both via the online library search the internet more generally. This presentation was supported by an additional presentation that explained and discussed the written elements of assessment. My intention is to develop students' critical and analytical skills whilst using case studies of media that they are familiar with.

On June 8th – 12th I will be leading a 'Film in 5 Days' competition for current Film and Film, Radio and Television (FRTV) students, that will offer an opportunity to create a 1-minute film. I will be providing all content for the competition via online videos and supplementing this with written documents. Final films will be viewed as an online live event and will offer current students an additional option for engagement with film and moving image studies beyond the scope of their

compulsory academic work. This competition will create opportunities for further development of practical and reflective skills during the current Covid-19 crisis.

When engaging with applicants for the FRTV and Film Production degree programmes, I considered the difficulties presented in being unable to invite potential students onto the physical campus. I felt it was important to engage applicants with online material and to provide them with an example of the teaching and approaches taken on the degree programmes. In discussion with the Programme Directors I created two YouTube presentations that provided an overview of the degree programmes – this was then sent as a link to potential students. Additionally, applicants were given the link to YouTube presentations on the Camera Obscura and the Kuleshov Effect; these ‘bite-sized’ versions of online lectures had instructions for creating a Camera Obscura and a version of the Kuleshov Effect.

Wider dissemination of ideas and content is something that I am interested in developing, particularly for younger people in schools and colleges who will feel familiar with moving image and sound as a primary form of communication. Lots of my work has been looking at platforms such as Vine, and its effective replacement, TikTok, and the ability of short-form video to convey effective narrative (fiction or non-fiction). I developed my Recap presentation on the 6-second film project as an experiment for current students. This approach can produce work that is a distillation of longer formats – care should be taken to ensure that appropriate theory; narrative and editing theory of practice in particular, are integrated into the content delivered; the results can be genuinely exciting and innovative whilst maintaining high standards of academic rigour. I am keen to design a package for younger people that would focus on the micro format and hope to provide a platform for under-represented voices. In the future I want to develop work that uses VR (virtual reality) technology to offer a democracy in the viewing experience; the viewer could be immersed in the moving image with the appropriate equipment (VR goggles/headsets), or choose where they focus their attention on the screen by using a cursor to change the perspective (if they are watching without access to additional equipment). It is specifically the blend of low cost, ‘low-tech’ equipment with emergent technologies that I find exciting in the area of film studies.

My teaching evidences my commitment to the development of students and young people, integration of my PhD research and scholarship, the provision of an inclusive and flexible learning environment and development of meaningful virtual spaces. I am committed to the principles set out in the CCCU Learning and Teaching Enhancement strategy, and the values of the Learning and

Teaching Strategy. I am looking forward to the opportunity to develop resources to further enrich young people in the wider community.

(2084 words)