

ADC-LTSN
Art Design and Communication
Learning and Teaching Support Network

LEARNING AND TEACHING

PROJECTS SUPPLEMENT, SUMMER 2003

EXPLORING THE STUDENT AND TUTOR
TRANSACTION IN ART AND DESIGN

INVESTIGATING THE TEACHING OF
RADIO STUDIES IN UK COURSES



EXPLORING LEARNING

In today's educational environment legislation can often appear to detract focus from the students that institutions and academics purport to serve. Understanding the student experience is crucial to providing an effective learning environment, but involving students in a process of dialogue requires a special effort.

With ever increasing workloads, teaching staff often feel they lack opportunities to closely examine what actually goes on in practical taught sessions. Assumptions of how students perceive teaching can often prove false, and yet a genuine dialogue is rarely sought. Many established lecturers base their teaching methods on their own experiences of learning and fail to appreciate that students today live in a very different world, stimulated and conditioned by a dynamic but transient multimedia culture. For many students academic staff are only important for the degrees they award. Real learning, students say, is something that happens elsewhere...

ATENDING A conference organised by GLAD in 2000, Carol Jones of Nottingham Trent University and Maureen Wayman of Manchester Metropolitan University found themselves chatting. The conference aimed to draw together experiences of subject reviews and to uncover what had been learnt. In different ways, staff at Manchester and Nottingham had been surprised by students' perceptions and understanding of the learning process. Following the conference the two institutions began planning a joint project to find out more about the learning transaction between tutor and student within practical Art and Design.

Establishing dialogue with students was a priority at Nottingham Trent, explained Carol Jones, Principal Lecturer in Contextual Studies. 'I was part of a team writing the teaching, learning and assessment strategy at Nottingham Trent for the School of Art and Design. We found a number of interesting things while we were doing this, but we hardly did any consultation with students and though we came up with a strategy we felt the need to go back and speak more closely with students. In 1988 a joint paper from CNAA and CHEAD was published entitled "On not sitting with Nellie". The title refers to a tutor sitting next to a student and directing what is going on rather than facilitating a learning experience that involves meaningful student interaction. We thought about this in our broader institutional context and recognised that we had limited understanding of student experiences in practical workshop scenarios.'

Professor Maureen Wayman, Dean of the Faculty of Art and Design at Manchester Metropolitan University, and Carol consulted with colleagues at their respective institutions and further developed their ideas into a project. Emphasis was placed upon recording observations related to experiences of studio-based learning in a descriptive rather than analytical manner. By focusing on a small number of modules, staff at Nottingham and Manchester sought to examine what they, as staff, say they do, what they actually do, and most importantly, what the students perceive they do.

'We wanted to find the real issues for students in the learning environment' said Carol. 'I think that we, as lecturers, tend to think we are specialists and arbiters of taste, but the students' visual culture out there is ubiquitous. Students have access to information now that they have never had in history and the traditional notion of the lecturer as the fount of all knowledge has eroded. We found students were saying that the prime areas of inspiration for them are not tutors. Students recognise the tutors as being important because they represent the Degree qualification and to some extent the skills, but they don't think tutors are important because they represent what is going on in the world. Often the expression Art and Design has always thought was a bit radical and innovative, but actually what goes on inside art schools today is often not nearly as innovative as what's going on in the world outside.'

A preliminary meeting of the partners was held to discuss the project outline and to exchange information relating to learning and teaching issues. Sue Bailey, Senior Learning and Teaching Fellow at Manchester, explained her central role in the development and implementation of the project. 'I have been undertaking research into the way Fashion students learn, and so this project was of real interest to me. I was looking for ways of explaining what we intuitively felt was happening in learning and teaching, trying to find overarching frameworks to explain what we were seeing. I thought it was important for our Project to focus on how students were approaching learning differently from each other, according to their different courses and learning environments. This project provided a perfect opportunity to explore this across two institutions and across six different courses. Carol Jones explained that the Project concentrated on Level Two students because it was felt to be an essential time for students to explore the interface with the external and professional world. 'It is important that students understand the skills they need to develop in their chosen pathways', said Carol. 'The learning of these skills is highly important but, equally, so is the students' ability to understand the bigger picture.' The partners decided to take a close look at modules delivered over a

semester and offered by six comparable undergraduate design courses. These were Fashion Design, Graphic Design, Textiles Design, delivered at Nottingham, and Graphic Design, Textiles Design, Design and Art Direction delivered at Manchester. Sue Bailey recognised the need to establish the starting points for each of the six courses involved, showing their inter-relationship. 'Imagine a spectrum', Sue explained, 'with theory-led courses at one end, and practice-led courses at the other. Theory or cognitive areas of study require students primarily to develop a theoretical perspective on their work. Practice areas essentially require students to focus on skills acquisition leading towards specialisation in a discipline. These are important differences. Now imagine a second axis that describes the way tutors understand what they are doing. At one end is the tutor-led model where tutors feel under stress, as if the more students they have the more it depends on the tutor to fill them with knowledge. At the other end of the axis staff create a student-led learning environment, where coping with large numbers is less stressful.'

The six selected courses showed a variety of learning approaches. However, it was clear that differences were not dictated by the courses themselves, or even by the institutions. The two Fashion courses, for example, showed quite contrasting strategies.

It was precisely these variables the project staff found so interesting as Dr Amanda Briggs-Goode, at Nottingham, explained 'We have been making moves in Textiles at Nottingham to change our teaching methods, and to distance ourselves from a constant studio presence to help develop greater student autonomy. When Carol asked me if I would be involved in the Project I was keen to look at the strategies being used by other courses and institutions. I was surprised by the approach taken in the Textile programme at Manchester which seemed to be trying to recreate a real life studio experience. I think that the new technologies within our industry are far too complex and expensive for educational establishments like ourselves, and therefore creating a real life experience is not possible for practical reasons. But educationally, I think students should be given a University experience and not that of a training school, which is where an emphasis on technology can lead.'

Maria Stafford, Senior Lecturer in Fashion at Nottingham, participated in the Project with Level Two Fashion students. 'The module I ran was linked with a disabled charity called AWARE, The Portland College for Disabled in Mansfield and Topman, and the students designed a menswear collection that incorporated design aspects to support disability. Working as a team on this sort of project is very



ABOVE
Lavinia Smith,
Final Year Printed Textiles
at Nottingham Trent,
exploring organic forms.

PROJECT AIMS

- To explore the learning transaction between student and tutor within practical Art and Design studio sessions.
- To compare experiences across six different courses taught at two collaborating institutions.
- To reflect on findings, feeding insights back into Learning and Teaching approaches in order to enhance and promote good practice.

FEATURES OF VARIATION IN LEVEL TWO COURSE CULTURES

THEME	PRACTICE/TUTOR LED	THEORY/STUDENT LED
Focus of Level Two	Deepening specialism	Developing cognitive abilities
Focus of teaching	PRODUCT: Skills, techniques, technology	PROCESS: methodologies
Focus of tutor's role	Supply advice and instruction	Supply 'brainfood' and direct students towards resources
Perceptions of students	Future designers	Questioners and visionaries
Qualities sought	Visualisation skills and contemporary awareness	Disciplined thinking and maverick tendencies



FRONT COVER
Emily Humphrey,
Level Two Textile Design at
Nottingham Trent.

RIGHT:
Carol Jones of
Nottingham Trent,
a driving force behind the
Students' Learning Project.



TOP: Mary Clark, Helen Senior and Laura Harris, Final Year Fashion students getting advice from Maria Stafford.

ABOVE: Laura Barnes, Level Two Textile student with Dr Amanda Briggs-Goode.

challenging and in terms of learning outcomes we were looking for technical inputs into garment design and manufacture, and the ability to work within a team situation and collate information. Encouraging team members who are having a tough week or compromising your own ideas for the good of the group collection are key learning outcomes. In industry students will very rarely design on their own. It is all about team work and this module reflects industry in practice, making it particularly interesting to explore as a learning experience.'

RECORDING STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Staff members involved with the delivery of selected modules in each institution were briefed, following which they sought volunteer participants from the students involved in each module. Student volunteers were also briefed and provided with Learning Logs in which to record anything relating to their learning experience. 'In the Learning Logs' Carol explained 'we asked students to track their own learning, describing both what they had learnt, and how they had learnt.' The institutions used Learning Logs in different ways. At Manchester students were given an open structure and asked to record their experiences as they felt appropriate. At Nottingham students were prompted with specific questions which related to the expectations staff had about learning from the module. These prompt questions were set out on sheets that students were asked to fill in regularly throughout their working week. This approach suited the more systematic and structured approach that the Nottingham team took in comparison to those at Manchester. Carol emphasised the importance of this flexibility. 'When asking students to keep a record we knew it had to be in formats that allowed comparison of information. We did not, however, feel the need to duplicate the formats at each institution as we both employed varied approaches to delivering the curricula. From the respective course documents

it was clear that there were different modus operandi across the learning and teaching methods employed, and naturally, across six different courses, there were differences in the learning environments.' In addition to Learning Logs, focus group discussions were held at the end of the module. Anticipating that students might not be comfortable with the disclosure of information about their learning experiences to their own staff, external consultants were employed to run the student focus group discussions.

PROJECT FINDINGS

A rich variety of reflections and insights emerged from both staff and student feedback. From her perspective, Sue Bailey explained how the nature of Level Two study had been questioned by the Project. 'We all say Level Two is about applying skills learnt in Level One, with experimentation and a bit of work experience, getting ready for Level Three. This is what staff agree on in theory and practically every prospectus says this, but in actuality there are big differences in Level Two across different approaches and courses. These differences clearly exist in the communication between tutors, and between tutors and students.' Reflecting on the learning environment Sue commented that the Project had highlighted how a 'structured learning environment traps tutors and students into interdependence, where modules with strict evaluation sheets can force

tutors and students into a mutual dependence upon each other. The more projects are set, and the less choice students have, the more competitive students become, and the more stressful is their learning. If they all do the same project without freedom to explore within a brief, students get very agitated.'

Amanda Briggs-Goode reflected that one of the main learning points for her related to student autonomy, and the desire to make students aware of the need to be self-motivated. 'Our final year students have their own studio, but not the first and second years, which is a constant issue. They used to have a room divided up into workspaces but our numbers simply became too great. The room was divided up so much that it inhibited teaching because there was no space large enough to teach a group of students. So the lack of a physical studio space, coupled with changes in the curriculum, mean that most first and second year students work from home. In doing so they lose out on the opportunity for feedback and responses from each other. The informal peer support environment is vital and our final year students really benefit from this. Large student groups, and the strategies used to encourage student autonomy, can result in the loss of peer learning environments, which should not be the case.'

Maria Stafford felt that the use of structured Learning Logs had benefited her Fashion students. 'Students recorded their participation in group work by filling in a log book, which were similar except with a name free version. Each group produced an action plan summarising their learning experiences, and at the end we could look through student log books to see their overall involvement. Students were also encouraged to identify their strengths and weaknesses, to use their strengths but also to link up with someone else in the room stronger than them in their weak areas. So peer learning was an active element of the module. I think the Project helped students produce better log books because the Learning Log format provided an effective structure with more critical questioning. In the past our student logs were a little bit woolly in comparison.' Maria was very open about the impact of the Project on her personally, saying it had been very beneficial 'because as I get older I grow away from the students' age group and my perception of how they are learning is perhaps not right. I want to know if they think a session is too long or how it could be better structured. I need student feedback to move the module forward and my perception alone is not enough. I got a lot of supportive feedback on the handouts used in the module, which made me aware that because of financial pressures students don't buy as many text books as I assumed they did, and that they choose the cheapest even if it's not the best. As a result of this Project I now ask students a lot more than before when I presumed too much. I am very careful with terminology now and constantly check that students understand what I mean.'

Maria's students said that during the Project they had a lot of discussion about their learning experience and one thing that came out related to workloads. 'We didn't think tutors were communicating well enough with each other. In one session a tutor would ask for a range of work by

Friday and another tutor would ask for something similar which meant the workload at certain points was too much. Better co-ordination would have helped to spread the workload across the semester. We didn't want to come across as moaning, but these pressure points became quite stressful. On the plus side we felt we were taught very well and that tutors were readily available and approachable. However, technical support was not enough, particularly in the second semester when final year students were getting their collections together. It's nice to have creative freedom but at the end of the day we are here to get a degree in order to find work and employers are looking for specific skills. Working on this project made us aware of how other people felt because we were discussing things along the way. Usually you just get on and do things without group discussion. The Project definitely helped us understand how staff look at our work and how they assess it, which made us feel more in control and therefore took away some of the stress.'

The quality and appropriateness of written feedback emerged as often being problematic, something that Carol Jones picked up on. 'A big response from students was that they don't understand the written feedback from tutors and that it often comes too late. They read the feedback but can't relate it back to any particular experience. Learning can be very fleeting in that you do something that because you don't track it you forget it straight away. If students try to understand how to learn from the experience it you then, usually great progress had to be made, it comes back and help with the work. The other thing is the quality of writing. You have to think as hard about what you say and at all times keep it as close as possible to the stated outcomes of the programme and assessment criteria. Students have said how frustrating it is when they read feedback but don't know how to progress. It is very important that students have time to digest written feedback before they come to a tutorial so that they can discuss it. I also believe in group feedback sessions rather than individual ones, because students always say they learn more from their peers than from tutors.'

At a strategic level Maureen Wayman described how the Project threw up things that she had not expected. 'We weren't prepared for the questioning of the traditional alignment of courses. Usually all the Graphic Design, Media and Communication courses are in one area, with Fine Art and Fine and Applied Arts in another area. Textile and Fashion are lumped together and so on. Sue and I are from Textiles and Fashion backgrounds so we know how difficult it can be for Textiles and Fashion to live together. This project has emphasised the need to think about organising the Faculty by delivery method rather than by tradition. I think we have to explore structures within Art and Design where the verticals are not as strong as the horizontals, where exchange and cross-practice work predominates. Of course this may mean that Programme Leaders have friction between them because of territorial space, with questions being asked like "why are they doing that when it is our field?" and "will it affect our student intake?" Examples of this can be seen already where film-making, photography and digital media have



ABOVE: Anthony Bellall, Level One student in Design and Art Direction, Manchester Metropolitan.



LEFT: Peter Lester running a mentoring tutorial with Graphic Design students at Nottingham Trent.

expanded into Fine Art areas in very exciting ways. I think that Fine Art has traditionally been the boiler house of art schools. If you didn't have Fine Art you were a School of Technology; but digital technology has upset this tradition and design has seized the power-base. However rumblings between Fine Art and new digital media could re-establish Fine Arts as the boiler house of art schools again, in a reconstituted 21st century way which I think could be brilliant.

'For example, we now have a course called Interactive Arts positioned alongside Fine Art. This course has learning outcomes but the emphasis is on a negotiated agreement between the individual and the tutor. It leads to really exciting work like students going to Mongolia, running radio stations and all sorts of career pathways, based on the student's own needs and interests that are negotiated with staff facilitating the learning process.'



Natasha Gilmore is a final year Textile student specialising in print. She talked of her participation in the Project during her Level Two study describing the use of a Learning Log and her reflections upon teaching methods and the learning environment.

'During this Project we were asked by the tutors to keep a record of our learning. We were given a file with sheets inside which was called a Learning Log and at the end of each teaching session we were asked to address a set of evaluation questions. We had about three teaching sessions a week and some of the questions were really quite complicated which meant we ended up spending a lot of time answering them when just a few sentences would probably have been enough. Although it was good to reflect on my learning it did become a bit of a chore at times. However, at points it really did make me evaluate why I did something and to ask myself what the session was all about in the grand scheme of things. This was quite useful and I could see at times exactly where the tutor was trying to take us and why. I think this understanding probably made me more successful in the module.



'In my course we didn't decide disciplines until the end of the first year choosing options from embroidery, knit, weave or print. I thought this was too late because I then had limited time to develop appropriate technical skills. I specialised in print but I don't feel particularly confident in this area in terms of practical skills and I would like to have had much more ongoing technical backup. It should not be a question of technical skills or conceptual ideas, but a partnership between the two. As I gain confidence in technical areas I can take it back into conceptual design areas, but without technical skills I will always lack confidence.

'Throughout the project we would typically have one group tutorial a week with maybe eight people in the group. We got verbal feedback throughout the module, but marks only at the end, followed by written feedback and a tutorial. In my experience the quality of written feedback from tutors can be very mixed. Some tutors are used to explaining

themselves succinctly and can fit comments into a limited amount of space. However a lot of written feedback can be vague and not give a clear indication of how to respond.

'I am a prime example of a marks-driven student because I don't have a lot of confidence in what I do and because I don't understand the process as well as I feel I ought to at this stage. I have been far too focused on what mark I am going to get rather than how I think my work is going. I don't feel confident about judging my work at all, or relating it to assessment criteria.

'The first course I did was a multi-disciplinary Art and Design course when there were far fewer students and more taught sessions. Tutors were around more and were much more accessible on an individual level. This was a few years ago when education seemed to me to be quite a bit different. However, on this course I think that we are treated like sheep and I have a real sense of being herded from one place to another! The relationship between staff and students is much less and much shallower than I experienced before. Nowadays if you need help you ask a technician, but a few years ago you would have asked a tutor. This is my perception. Of course, there are far more students in each year group now and how you do it differently, I don't know. E-mail is used a lot for communicating with tutors and most of them reply fairly promptly. As long as you have got two or three days to get a reply, then e-mail is okay.

'I don't think tutors are taught how to teach. I work full-time in social care as well as doing this course and one of the most important things is social interaction, how you communicate with people. I have a really supportive boss who lets me arrange my hours around my course, but it's incredibly difficult. People don't believe how much money students are expected to live off. Students get considerably less than people on benefits. I get £3,500 for a student loan, £1,000 of which goes back to the college so I have £2,500 to live on for the academic year. What's that about! Who can live off that? You make your decision to get into debt or not to do the course and it's a big worry. Tutors say they understand that we need to work, but then they say this is a full-time course and we expect you to work full-time on it. Where's the understanding there?



ABOVE: Natasha Gilmore's Sketchbook.

OPPOSITE: Lavinia Smith, Final Year Printed Textiles at Nottingham Trent.

LEFT: Natasha Gilmore and Karen Gilmore, Final Year Textile students.

Carol Jones made similar reflections at Nottingham where 'what came through very strongly was an issue of departmentalisation, where students do not feel able to utilise facilities and resources from other courses. They live in a very integrated culture where music, video, fashion, performance, style, art and so on are all part of one big multi-disciplinary experience. Students are embedded in this culture where they don't see their courses existing in boxes. In an institution that claims to encourage innovation this has got to be a really encouraging anomaly. Regarding the ability of a student writing feedback, Carol expressed the intention to having staff who understood and coped with this approach. I don't think universities have successfully introduced training for staff in this area and so a lot of people think that student-centred means giving students a box and sending them away. This project highlighted that not all staff really understand the concept of student-centred teaching. This can often be true of older staff members who have not been through internal postgraduate teaching certificates, but interestingly it can apply to younger staff members who have been taught in that old "sitting by Nellie" way.'

FUTURE IMPACTS

'At Nottingham we have been able to feed our reflections back to senior managers in the Faculty' explained Carol, 'and as a result we have received a large amount of money to carry on a Learning to Learn project for Level One students, Learning to Learn, although it is an awful title that reminds me of that dreadful 1970's song "I Love to Love", is the sort of project that we really do want to get to grips with, preparing students for their three year degree experience'. At Manchester, the Project has highlighted how the learning environment has a considerable influence on the way students perceive the object of learning and, therefore, on what their learning intentions and activities will be. The Faculty's Centre for Learning and Teaching is conducting research into student conceptions of, and approaches to, learning across a range of courses in Art and Design with the aim of exploring further the relationship between these factors. The role of Learning Logs is being taken further with exploration of critical reflection as part of the learning process, identifying and building upon good practice.

RADIO RENNAISSANCE

Radio is by far the oldest broadcast medium and continues to retain a larger global audience than television, yet for many years it has suffered relative neglect. Throughout the UK many media studies courses appear to pay scant attention to radio, preferring to concentrate exclusively on TV, Film, Print, and New Media.

The Radio Studies Network (RSN) was formed in December 1998, as an association whose aim is to encourage study and research in radio, and seek ways to improve its academic and cultural status. In the UK radio is very important in domestic life and new technologies are creating innovative settings for radio use such as the internet, satellite and mobile phones. However, those involved in teaching radio suspect that many UK Higher Education courses remain preoccupied with visual media. Where radio does exist at degree course level, it is felt to be as a smaller element of a 'Media History' module, or as a 'practical' subject often closely allied to dominant areas like Journalism. This situation needed to be explored to discover if the perceptions were true...

A GAINST THIS background, the Radio Studies Network developed a research project examining the teaching of radio studies throughout UK Higher Education. The Network is made up of members from across the world, many of whom are linked to educational establishments. Eryl Price-Davies of Thames Valley University, and Peter Lewis of the London School of Economics and Political Science, developed the initial Project proposal, and used some of the subsequent funding to support Di Harris as a researcher. The Project set out to identify where, and in what ways, the teaching of radio features as part of the UK Higher Education curriculum, and to build a taxonomy of courses, materials, methods and modes of assessment.

Eryl Price-Davies described how the Project evolved. 'The Radio Studies Network began in 1998 when a group of us teaching radio decided it would be helpful to get together. In the beginning we had representatives from about 15 institutions. We created remits for the Network that included increasing access to archive radio footage and promoting radio as a medium. Relating to Learning and Teaching, we also established the goal of sharing best practice and teaching ideas amongst our members. I was appointed as the Network's Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator and, therefore, exploring how radio is taught and sharing good practice really came down to me. I began by setting up an email discussion list and we now have an international membership of about 300 subscribers from America, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Luxembourg, Belgium, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India, with the bulk in the UK. It was through this discussion list that the idea was put forward to undertake some formal research into the teaching of radio in the UK. We wanted to map Radio Studies across the UK and we identified nearly 50 UK courses that included at least some work on radio. Of these, 30 institutions responded to a questionnaire that we distributed, and from this we have been able to produce a matrix showing the institutions that cover radio, and the approaches to learning and teaching. We hope this will provide a valuable resource for current and prospective students, for teachers, and for other

interested parties, such as the radio industries, and go some way towards encouraging more institutions to include radio on their curricula.'

At Thames Valley University (TVU) the teaching of radio started with Eryl running a one semester optional course entitled 'Understanding Radio' where students looked at traditions of radio and explored applying the concept of genres to radio as a medium. 'Students listened a great deal to the radio and kept a listening diary' explained Eryl 'and applied the discussions concerning quality that were being levelled at television, to radio. Initially it was all theoretical but then the focus was shifted on more practical work, exploring areas like comedy and documentary, and now we offer a full range including music presentation.'

It has taken Eryl about ten years to develop radio studies at TVU, where he has now been joined by a second full-time staff member, Steve Taylor. Together they work with a yearly intake of 25 students opting for radio as a named pathway. Additional students choose radio as an elected module and therefore it is possible for a module to contain around 65 students.

Dr Jeremy Strong is the Head of Media at TVU and he explained how Radio Broadcasting fits into the curriculum. 'We have a diverse group of staff in a number of areas that include Media Arts, Media Studies, Video Production, Photography, Advertising, New Media and Journalism. All these different areas have a pathway leader and I co-ordinate them. I think radio is particularly important in the balance it offers between placing radio in a historical and academic context in the Media Studies tradition as well as developing students' creative and technical skills. Both Eryl and Steve place a premium on this balance. Eryl never lets me forget that radio is the main broadcast medium in the UK and clearly from that point of view it is important that students engage with it. There has been a tendency in Media Studies to focus on the screen and print journalism and to forget the importance of radio. Radio doesn't take as much financial commitment as video but if it's to be taught it has to be done well and it's not cheap to resource.'



PROJECT AIMS

To survey where, and in what ways, the teaching of radio features in UK Higher Education Institutions.

To build a taxonomy of courses, materials, methods and modes of assessment.

To provide a resource to encourage and facilitate more institutions to introduce radio studies onto their curricula.

Production' and teaches basic radio skills, doing interviews, collecting vox pops, basic radio scripting and putting together a creative feature package. We can get students without any radio background or indeed without any IT skills, but we also get students who have done a radio course before or worked in radio. Some students have even set up their own pirate stations at home. It can be a mixed bag. By the end of the module all the students will have a basic level of skills, including using mini disc recorders, interviewing, having confidence to stop people on the street, and being able to write radiogenically. This means writing for the ear. Some words are more evocative than others, and it's all about language. A lot of stuff on radio is only experienced once by the listener and it's not like reading an article that you can go back to. In radio you have to get the message across in that live moment. This is one of the building blocks of radio that students need to learn.

'The second module we run is called "Contemporary Radio Practice" and has a focus on music radio. This looks at how radio stations brand themselves and the associated issues in terms of audience positioning. Students are given a radio station to investigate and listen to. Working in groups they explore the strategy that the station is adopting, making connections between the music played,



ABOVE: Peter Webber, final year student in Media Arts and Radio Broadcasting.

LEFT: Steve Taylor, Senior Lecturer in Radio Broadcasting and Cultural Theory at Thames Valley University.

the presentation and speech policy, the target audience based on advertising, scheduling and history of the station. The next assignment gets students into the recording studios working individually to produce an hour of radio. We assess them on their technical skills, but mostly we look for them to demonstrate their understanding of relating to an audience group so that everything in the programme is there for a purpose. Learning the rules at this level allows them to break the rules later on with contextual awareness. We always encourage them to think innovatively.'

Radio is not always given the respect that Eryl believes it deserves. 'It is sometimes seen as a pop



RIGHT: Eryl Price-Davies, Principal Lecturer and Pathway Leader for Radio Broadcasting at Thames Valley University



ABOVE:
Ealing Film Studios
where students have access
to sound recording facilities.



RIGHT:
Dr Jeremy Strong,
Head of Media,
Thames Valley University.

BELOW:
Eryl Price-Davies
introducing final year
Radio Broadcast students
to HG Wells' 1938 classic
'The War Of The Worlds'.



and prattle medium, an inane delivery mechanism for pop music. In the UK we are lucky because we have Radio Three and Four, and the tradition of public broadcasting with the BBC. There are some really good commercial stations too, and there is certainly a rich history to draw upon. However, there is a lack of critical material available on radio. If you want to study television there are hundreds of books to help you in all areas you can imagine. Radio doesn't have this, perhaps because of the ephemerality of radio as a medium. People don't tend to archive radio, and you can't buy radios where you can easily record programmes with a timer like you can with a VCR. The technology reinforces this ephemerality and radio is the most disposable medium, even more than newspapers. Most stations only keep broadcasts for legal reasons and throw them away after 42 days. Documentaries and features are stored, but the live shows are gone forever. So those of us who teach radio have an informal network to share programmes with each other. I am playing 'The War of the Worlds' to my students today using a copy that I recorded off the radio last time it was broadcast on Radio Four, and I'm sure that someone will ask for a copy of this on the discussion board before too long.'

The link often made between Journalism Courses and radio is something that Eryl, and other members of the Radio Studies Network, feel needs to be shaken off. 'Lecturers need to have confidence that teaching students to produce music-based programming is not simply perpetuating a despised cultural product. There is a real skill to music-based programming, effectively linking sequences, providing people with all those great attributes that go with radio like intimacy and companionship. Teaching these skills is important. But we need to also concentrate upon teaching aurality, which has been massively marginalised in media studies. I often talk about the tyranny of the visual. Media Studies is dominated by visual media. We are constantly told that we live in an increasingly visual world, but this massively overlooks and ignores the importance of sound in everyday life, the soundscape and the texture of sound, links between sound and memory, and so on. There is work starting to be done in these areas now. The University of Kent has been involved in a long dialogue about an etymological approach to radio, the nature of radio as a medium, how to define it and so on. All these areas provide potential radio lecturers with ways of working radio into their curriculum so that radio isn't just something done in specialist radio pathways, but is integrated into the broader Media Studies curriculum. Why not talk about radio news rather than television? Why not talk about radio Breakfast Shows rather than Film Westerns? We have a two-fold task, to develop radio in its own right and to get our colleagues in Communication and Media Studies to think about radio studies as well.'

For the past six years, students at Thames Valley University have been running their own radio station for a month each year, broadcasting with the support of the Student Broadcast Network (SBN). The radio station is run by final year students undertaking radio as a main pathway, and is integrated into the curriculum. The students undertake all the different

roles involved in running a radio station, beginning their planning months in advance. Aoife McElwaine described how the station works. 'Our station is called Tube Radio and I have the role of Head of Music. There are eight of us as a core team being assessed, but there are about 30 students involved in all. Other roles include Head of News, Head of Production, Head of Promotions, Head of Marketing, Head of Speech and Programme Controller. I chose to be involved in running Tube Radio because it is a really good experience and it would take me a very long time to get a job like this in a permanent radio station, doing what I am doing right now. As head of Music I have to decide the "play list" and how strictly it is enforced. The "play list" is there to create a face to the radio station. If you listen to different radio stations they can be worlds apart because of the different types of music they play, so that people flicking through the airwaves can immediately tell the different stations. This cohesion comes down to the Head of Music in selecting appropriate records for the listenership. All our presenters are required to play a certain number of records every hour from the play list I have put together. I'm thinking of enforcing that three A list songs per hour and two B list songs must be played. This is probably enough without being too strict, so the other presenters have some freedom of choice as well.'

'The Student Broadcast Network is based in Camden and they support a variety of student stations. They pay us to run their advertisements but they also provide set shows that we have to play, so it's a give and take relationship. For example, they provide the news in the top of each hour which is really useful because keeping an updated news show takes constant attention. Also, if anything goes wrong we can bring in their music with a fader on the desk, and that's a good safety net to have. It's been quite useful to look at their website as well, getting ideas from other student radio stations.'

Students at TVU are located a few hundred yards away from the famous Ealing Film Studios, and are able to use the Studio's sound recording facilities. 'It's great to walk into Ealing Studios with all the history' said Aoife 'and the facilities are really excellent. It's good to understand the background to radio but there is no point having the theory without the practical skills if you want to get employment. Using the facilities here has been invaluable.'

Getting the right balance between theory and practice is something that Eryl fully appreciates. 'There is a lot of variety across institutions and it often comes down to the background of the people teaching the course who are usually either from a technical skills background or from a theoretical background. However, we all share a passion for radio and I think it is very important to break down the barriers between practice and theory. In fact, there is no such thing as un-theoretical practice! As soon as you point a microphone at someone you do it from an informed position with a set of ideological practices that underpin it. In our teaching we combine technical skills with theoretical discussion, and do not have modules in technical skills as a separate entity.'



ABOVE:
Aoife McElwain, final year
Media Arts and Radio
Broadcast student preparing
playlists in her role as
Head of Music for the student
Tube Radio Station.

Students at TVU are asked to maintain Production Files and Learning Diaries to help them critically reflect on their learning. Encouraged to look upon them as an equivalent of an artist's sketchbook, the students' Learning Diaries come in many formats. In fact, the format should be dictated by a rich content of notes, flights of fancies and ideas, reviews of radio programmes listened to, things cut out of magazines and newspapers, and so on. 'We use our Learning Diaries to record everything,' explained Josie Barnes, a final year Media Arts student 'all our ideas, some of which are really rubbish and some we want to use. All this goes into the learning book as a record of how our ideas develop. I could be sitting in the café and a friend says something which I think worth noting down. It could be drawings and doodles...whatever.' The Learning Diaries enable the tutors to see the developmental process from the original idea, through a process of selection and refinement to the finished product. The learning experience at TVU is considerably enhanced by being hugely diverse. 'The richness of our multicultural college is fantastic' said Eryl. 'I learn by just being a part of it. Quite often I am the only white European in a teaching situation. On our radio station we have had shows in Gujarati and Hindi, as well as Nigerian and Afro-Caribbean specialist programmes. We laugh at issues of Widening Participation because we pass targets many times over.'

PROJECT FINDINGS

- 1) Overwhelmingly radio is being taught as a 'practical' subject, though most respondents stated that they aimed to integrate 'theory' and 'practice'. For some, 'theory' is equated with offering students an understanding of the workings of the industry, for others the term refers to conventional 'Media Theory'.
- 2) The vast majority of radio courses attract relatively small numbers of students especially where it is offered as a distinctive 'pathway' or 'named route'.
- 3) A wide range of modules are taught, from Basic Production Skills and Writing for Radio, to Women and Radio and Alternative Radio.
- 4) Radio Drama is a popular topic at a number of institutions. This is somewhat surprising given the fact that only 12 of the respondents assess work done by students on the student radio station. The implication is that speech-based programming is being taught more than music-based programming, despite the fact that students overwhelmingly listen to music-based stations, and have much more experience in this area.
- 5) Eight of the institutions that responded do not have an audio library for use by students.
- 6) There is a broad mix of teaching and learning activities being employed, though with more emphasis on workshops and studio-based work, rather than lectures and seminars. The use of 'work books' or diaries is popular to help students critically reflect on their own learning during a module, although the context and use of these wasn't always clear.
- 7) Broadcasting is regarded by many tutors as a central component of their courses, and the majority have a student radio station at their institution. By no means all, however, incorporate the student station into the course work, or allow students to gain academic credit for the work they do for the station.
- 8) Guest speakers are widely used, and almost all courses have good links with the industry. This is reflected in students taking part in work experience schemes with local stations, and by many tutors continuing to work in the industry on a part-time or freelance basis.
- 9) There is clear support for a separate awards scheme, perhaps organised by the Radio Studies Network, which could compliment the Linda Gage Awards (for journalism) and the Student Radio Association (SRA) awards (mainly for music).
- 10) A number of respondents asked the question 'what is radio-studies?', and there is opportunity for the RSN to be pro-active in encouraging debate about the topic.



ABOVE: A typical group tutorial session discussing the theory and background behind classic radio productions.

From a student's perspective the multi-cultural nature of TVU can also have a negative impact however, especially for a first year student trying to find their feet. Julie is a Norwegian student now in her second year studying Journalism and Radio. 'When you are from a small country like Norway' she explained 'it is really important to go out and see the world. When I first arrived I was very homesick and felt very unhappy. TVU is very multi-cultural and to a certain extent this is good, but I get a bit fed up wondering if there are any English people around. There is always talk of this community or that community. It can be quite confusing but I have to admit I am not the only foreign student. For people of Chinese race who I really trust and they also want to make great radio so I'm feeling much happier. I would really like to be a radio producer as a career. I like to inspire other people to be creative and radio is very special, and different from film. I think radio has more beautiful pictures because you have to use your imagination. All listeners have different images in their minds that they create, which I think is fantastic. It's all about the voice, timing, and the connection to the listener. When I am out recording interviews, it is about trust. The first seconds when I hold out the microphone and try to connect with someone are crucial. People can be anonymous if they want to yet still speak for themselves. When I get this trust relationship, people feel relaxed and they really start talking and I love it.'

Despite the rapid increase of commercial radio stations in the UK, there is an irony associated with employment opportunities. Most stations are actually part of larger media groups and there are only a few genuine independent stations left. In fact, the whole of the UK radio network is controlled by less than ten major groups. This means that by economy of scale there are fewer people being employed. A local station may only have about six staff because much of its programming comes down a line from a central production office. News, for example, will be done centrally and regional stations simply bring it in with a fader on the desk. Play-listings are done in a similar manner. Listeners generally have no idea that their 'local' radio station is, in fact, a generic hybrid.

Issues of employability are therefore central to TVU's educational approach, as Eryl explained. 'We encourage students need to think creatively about career opportunities. There are a lot of jobs in selling artwork, marketing and branding as well as production and presenting. Some students passionately want to work in radio drama and getting in is hard, but if you keep trying long enough then it's possible. The London Drama Studio is just up the road and we are keen to involve their students as actors in productions written and produced by our students. This seems to me a mutually beneficial arrangement.'

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The immediate outcome of the Radio Studies Network Project has been the identification of a broad range of courses offering radio-studies at undergraduate level in UK Higher Education. Whilst the list is not complete, it does provide a valuable source of information for a number of possible user groups, including prospective students, lecturers, researchers, and those from the radio industry. Following on from the initial stages of the research, three individuals were invited to give short presentations at a 'Radiodysey' conference hosted by the Radio Studies Network in July 2001. These presentations focused on specific examples of teaching and learning being used, and included ideas on live studio presentation as well as project-based learning. A web-site has been established offering a summary of the results of the survey, with links to each of the institutions that responded. This site enables people to gain an overview of where and how radio studies is being taught, and to contact the relevant institutions directly. The Project has led to the further development of the Radio Studies Network as a forum for debate about learning and teaching, and there have been a series of lively interactions on the e-mail discussion list relating to topics that include the assessment of group work, the value of work experience, the importance of journalistic training for prospective broadcasters, and the integration of 'theory' and 'practice'. In the longer term, one goal is to establish a 'radio studies hub' on the internet which can act as an umbrella site for a series of radio studies web sites.

Recently a number of new text-books have been published for students in the field of radio studies and these are warmly welcomed by those involved in radio studies. However, there is a clear need for material aimed at lecturers. Eryl Price-Davies believes that there may well be a considerable number of individuals across the UK and elsewhere who would like to introduce radio studies into their curricula. They feel unable to do so, he says, because of a lack of familiarity with the field and some hesitation about how to go about it at course-level. It is hoped that this research can begin the process of encouraging more lecturers to start including radio studies on their courses. In doing so they will offer students opportunities to learn more about a dynamic and consistently relevant media, with a rich past, a hugely varied present, and an exciting future.

A full list of institutions surveyed in this research, together with detailed information about the radio components offered can be viewed at <http://mercury.yu.ac.uk/radiostudies>

FUNDED PROJECTS

ADC-LTSN LEARNING AND TEACHING PROJECT FUND

Phase 1 (2000/01)
Radio Teaching & Learning Project: Bevil Swaine, Newcastle

Critical Distance: An investigation into the function of the text in a flexible learning environment. The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College

SKILLBASE: The role of the technicist and demonstrator in A&D learning. Staffordshire University

Phase 2 (2000/01)
The development of pedagogy in relation to learning how to learn. The London College of Fashion, London Institute

Developing Web-based Interactive Multimedia Resources for Art and Design. The Robert Gordon University, Gony School of Art and Design

A collaborative approach to ensuring effective and appropriate support for students with specific health difficulties on the Art and Design Programme of Study at University College Worcester. Worcester College, Worcester

Mathematical for learning, teaching, and assessment in art and design. Nottingham Trent University and Wrexham, Metropolitan University

Effective Assessment in Art & Design. The London Institute, City College of Art, Wrexham School of Art (C&T&D)

Phase 3 (2001/02)
Developing Professional Studies for Art, Design and Communication Students. The Arts Institute at Birmingham

Problem-based learning strategies in art and design. East Institute of Art and Design

Understanding Individual Learning Needs as an approach to Self-Developmental Behaviour in Design Degree Programmes. University of Northumbria at Newcastle

Phase 4 (2001/02)
Developing Online Resources For Dynamic Modules in Art and Design. Gony School of Art, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen

Managing the interface between students' vocational knowledge and academic knowledge in film. Department of Design, Film & Television Studies, University of Wales, Aberystwyth

Teaching and Disseminating an Interactive Creative Learning Programme. School of Art and Design, University of Ulster

Developing a Research Training Research Centre on the Web. Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, University of Central England

Irresistible Evidence: New Strategies for the Photographic Document. Swansea School of Art & Design, Swansea Institute of HE

Strategies for Managing the Relation Between Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Media Social Contexts. Department of Media Arts, University of London

Working across disciplines: learning media. Swan Theatre, University of Glamorgan

Work in Supporting of Photo and e-Communication. School of Art and Humanities, University of North London, and Liverpool John Moores University

Phase 5 (2002/03)
Picture Faculty: Distance Education in Communication, Culture and Media Studies in the UK. Coventry University

CULTURAL STUDIES PROJECT FUND - MAY 2002

Embedding 'Indicative Assessment' practices: a strategic approach. Sheffield Hallam University

Evaluating pedagogy in cultural studies for an expanded definition of responsibility. Liverpool John Moores University

Developing 'Community Media Practice' in the context of Media & Cultural Studies. (MCS) at Nottingham Trent University (NTU) Nottingham Trent University

A collaborative project in the research and development of self-directed learning for a new Journalism module. University of Luton, Bedfordshire

Learning by producing online journals. Bath Spa University College, Department of Cultural Studies, Work Experience, University of Surrey, Bathampton

PEDAGOGIC RESEARCH PROJECT FUND - MAY 2002

Personal Chronicles for 'Reflection' on Creative Practice. School of Media Art Performing Arts, University of Ulster

Assessing the usability of online resources in Media Studies Professional Studies curriculum. Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, University of Central England

What's the Representation? Models of Theory and Practice in Art and Design. University of Northumbria, School of Art, Media and Design, University of Wales, Newport

Developing a Web-Based Personal Development Planning and Assessment Tool for Creative Practice. Gony School of Art, The Robert Gordon University

Assessing Critical and contextual Understanding in the first year of the BA Fine Art Degree course. Anglia Polytechnic University

Staff and student perceptions of Assessment Online Learning Outcomes in Art, Design and Communication. London College of Fashion, London Institute

Further details about funds, procedure for application and projects funded to date are available from the ADC-LTSN website - www.bton.ac.uk/adc-ltsn/projects.htm

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