

Proposal for ALDinHE Symposium, April 2007.

Presenters:

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Picture this: Using visual research methodology to explore how students engage with visual learning and assessment.

A collaborative project, funded by LearnHigher, seeks to address the current shortage of effective support for students and staff engaged in visual assessment practices. Brighton University, University of Kent and University College Falmouth are together investigating how students learn by being assessed through visual media and oral feedback.

As the HEA Art Design Media Subject Centre noted in prioritising their own project themes for 2006, the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2005 indicated that student satisfaction with assessment was a particular issue for art, design and media [and results for 2006 appear to be similar]. It was suggested that students' perception may be distorted by misinterpreting the requirements of both the course and the terminology of the Survey; they may not recognise the widely used studio 'crit' as a form of feedback, for example. The consequence of such misunderstanding is that opportunities for students' learning development are missed. The sector has identified a need to reflect on current assessment practices, provide a clearer framework for assessment and produce a range of usable resources and examples of good practice.

At the same time, staff in non-visual subjects are increasingly being encouraged to develop more visual assessment formats – such as posters, well-illustrated oral presentations, or web pages - sometimes to provide 'reasonable adjustments' for students with disabilities but also as a way to vary the total assessment regime and help develop transferable skills. However, where such formats are unfamiliar to a discipline area, staff may lack confidence or rigour in setting and marking projects appropriately, and students may struggle to understand how to approach these tasks.

This session examines the development of a methodology for the first phase of this research which captures and uses visual data in a visual context for visual learners in a collaborative representation (Banks 1995). It explores how the methodology has been adapted for different institutional contexts and subject areas and reviews the particular opportunities and challenges of visual acquisition, documentation and analysis (Prosser, forthcoming).

Further development of this research will be to explore systems of analysis of the multi-faceted and inter-related elements of this complex data and to enquire how it may shape the development of teaching and learning resources. During the session participants will view material from the data capture and will have the opportunity to contribute to consultative discussion on how such material can be sensitively edited, annotated and used to support staff development and to enhance student learning.