

What impact does increasing practice-based learning within higher education filmmaking have on learner engagement?

The basis for this action research is rooted in exploring the thematic concern of a potential misalignment between students expectations of higher education creative courses and the pedagogical approaches used.

Module code: ECPT6009
Assessment component: A2
Student name: Lewis Evans
Student number: 2008375

01. Introduction - thematic concern

- Filmmaking is inherently practical, yet teaching is theoretically driven.
- Observed student disengagement and underused resources and facilities.
- Suggests a mismatch between the pedagogical approach and student expectations.

02. Research aim

- To evaluate the impact of increased practice-based learning on student engagement.
- Consider rebalancing theory and practice to enhance engagement in higher Education filmmaking.

03. Methodology

Action Research:

- Model: Stephen Kemmis & Robin McTaggart spiral.

Plan:

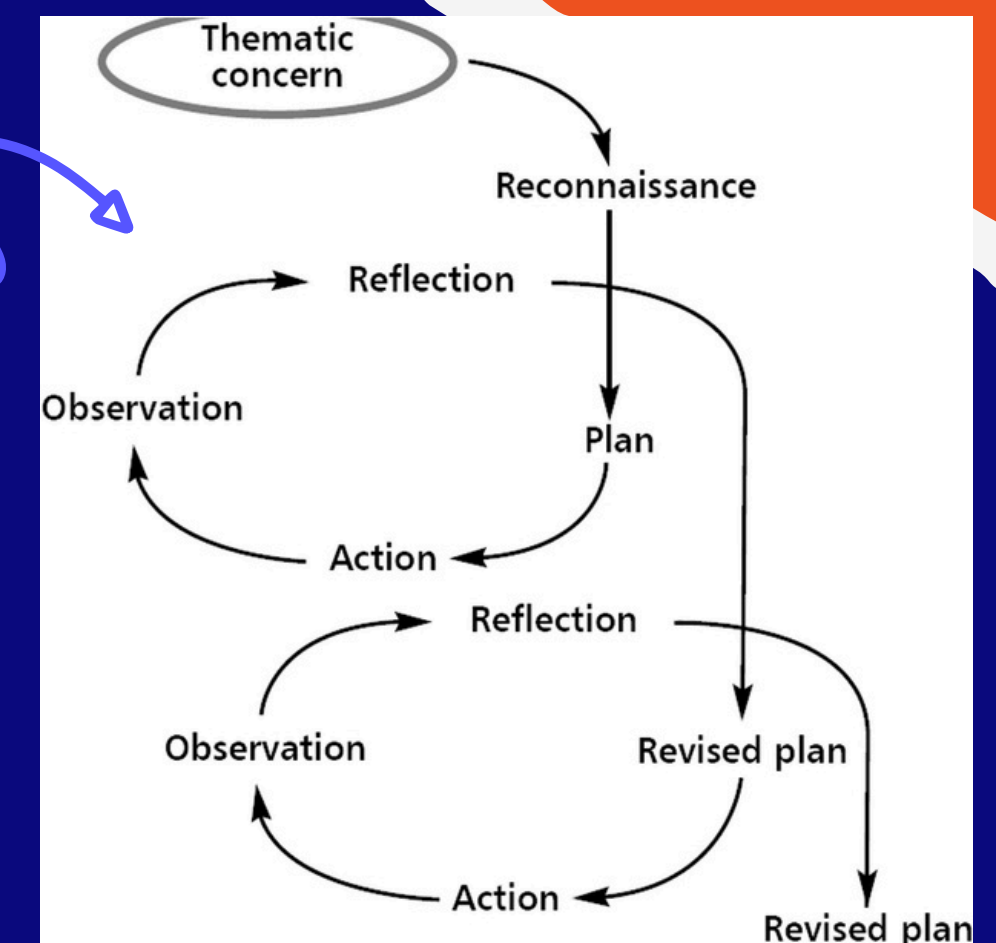
- Short lecture (45-minutes).
- Extended structured practical tasks.

Data:

- Secondary research
- Observation.
- Informal student feedback.

Scope:

- Single cohort (level 4).



04. Reconnaissance questions

1. How can experiential learning support student development within higher education filmmaking?
2. How do learner styles influence engagement in creative subjects?
3. Does the role of the lecturer need to evolve within higher education filmmaking?

05. Reconnaissance literature review

1. Theory vs Practice

John Biggs & Catherine Tang - quantitative vs qualitative learning.

2. Experiential learning

John Dewey - Learning by doing.

David Kolb - Experiential learning cycle.

Donald Schön - Reflection-in-action.

3. Learner Styles

Neil Fleming - VARK.

Peter Honey & Alan Mumford - learner styles.

4. Role of a lecturer

From lecturer to mentor.

Learning styles and student engagement (2023)

Research article suggests that the dominant learner styles in humanities subjects are pragmatists and activists.

06. Observation & reflection

1. Increased engagement.
2. Enhanced learning.
3. Better alignment with learner needs.
4. Enhancements in my own teaching practice.

- Supports experiential learning as an pedagogical effective approach in creative disciplines.
- Demonstrates importance of integrating practical elements into lessons.
- Suggests need to redefine lecturers as mentors.

Limitations of research

- Small scale (single cohort).
- No formal Primary data gathered (interviews, surveys, results).
- Cannot confirm impact on assessment outcomes.

07. Recommendations

1. Further research:

- Expand research to include more cohorts and creative disciplines.
- Explore the impact of scaffolded learning on assessment outcomes.
- Collect primary research data to strengthen recommendations and explore the implications of this research on learner's academic success.

2. Explore a blended teaching approach:

- Develop an approach to implementing practical elements into lessons that avoid time and resource restrictions.

3. Stronger consideration for learner styles in lesson/ course planning.

- Allow learner styles to positively influence planning and development.

08. Conclusion

- Practice-based learning can be observed to improve engagement and depth of learning.
- The research and observation aligns with experiential learning and student-centred pedagogies.
- Further research required to confirm impact on academic success such as assessment outcomes.

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Poster presentation script

Module code: ECPT6009

Assessment component: A2

Student name: Lewis Evans

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Introduction

Hello, my name is Lewis Evans and This is my action research poster presentation.

My research question is what impact does increasing practice-based learning within higher education filmmaking have on learner engagement.

The basis for this action research is rooted in exploring the thematic concern of a potential misalignment between students expectations of higher education creative courses and the pedagogical approaches used.

For context, this thematic concern has developed for me through my observations on my placement of study for my teaching practice, which is on a university filmmaking course. Over time I have observed disengagement rise in students through a decline of participation in lectures, and attendance.

Section 1

This brings me to section 1 of this poster, introduction – thematic concern. Filmmaking is a predominately practical career with a demand for technical and practical skills ranging from setting up a camera to using editing software. However, the programme is predominantly theoretically driven. I believe this is a contributing factor to students disengaging from the programme despite the programme having fantastic equipment and even a TV studio, however, these are rarely used. Based on my observations and student feedback, it can be suggested that there is a mismatch between the pedagogical approaches being used and students expectations of how the course would operate, with a more hands-on approach.

Section 2

The aims of this research are simple in section 2 of this poster:

- To evaluate the impact of increased practice-based learning on student engagement.

And

- Consider rebalancing theory and practice to enhance engagement in higher Education filmmaking.

Section 3

Moving on to section 3, the methodology used project was action research, but more specifically the action research spiral developed by Kemmis and McTaggart. Action research allows me to input my experiences as a legitimate part of this project. I feel I have identified an area of interest to improve practice and action research allows me to learn and adapt my approach to discover a suitable solution.

As a breakdown to how I used this spiral:

I identified a thematic concern, the misalignment of pedagogical approach and student development.

I used a literature review as my reconnaissance to ascertain current thinking and legitimise my recommendations.

My plan was to reverse my teaching approach by having a short 45-minute lecture, followed by longer, structured and purposeful practical element.

I put this plan into action through my placement of study with one cohort, level 4.

I observed the impact and reflected on the experience to generate recommendations for a revised plan.

There was no primary data collected due to time constraints so this project utilised secondary research, observations and informal student feedback.

Section 4 and 5

Moving onto sections 4 and 5 looks at the reconnaissance. Within section 4 are my research questions that guided the literature review. The questions are:

1. How can experiential learning support student development within higher education filmmaking?
2. How do learner styles influence engagement in creative subjects?

3. Does the role of the lecturer need to evolve within higher education filmmaking?

The key findings from this reconnaissance are detailed in section 5.

The first finding was understanding the difference between practice and theory. John Biggs and Cathrine Tang argue that it is a matter of looking at learning as quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative learning seeks to increase the volume of knowledge, whereas qualitative learning seeks to deepen that knowledge. In theory, lectures can serve as quantitative learning as more ground can be covered, with practical sessions being utilised to deepen the learning achieved in lectures.

Secondly, this led to exploring experiential learning as a potential solution to engaging learners in creative subjects.

John Dewey emphasises learning through experience, suggesting that education should be grounded in real-world activities. In this instance, simulated situations should work to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

This is reinforced by David Kolb's experiential learning cycle, which outlines learning as a continuous process of concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.

Additionally, Donald Schön's concept of reflection-in-action supports the idea that learners develop deeper understanding through active learning. I feel this is ultimately what the goal may be with regards to student development. The ability to reflect in the moment and positively change the outcome of a situation by utilising their experiences and learning.

Thirdly, was how learner styles influence engagement.

Neil Flemings work on sensory modes and the development of the VARK model suggest educators should aim to utilise a blend of the sensory modes of consider how they can communicate the learning through visual, auditory, read/write and kinesthetic.

This is further developed by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford's learner styles of activists, reflectors, pragmatists and theroists. In a 2023 research journal, the results demonstrate that the dominant learner styles in humanities subjects are pragmatists and activists, those who predominantly learn by doing.

And finally, the research conducted here suggested that in order to fulfil student expectations based on what has been learned so far, lecturers may need to consider shifting into a mentor role in filmmaking programmes. Serving as a facilitator of learning rather than the controller of learning. This allows students autonomy over the learning and create better alignment between their goals of the learning.

This literature review reconnaissance informed my plan to reverse my approach with a shorter lecture followed by spending more time on a purposeful practical task.

Section 6

Moving onto section 6 of observations and reflections after executing the plan and what I discovered.

Firstly, there was a noticeable increase in student engagement. This was observed by higher levels of participation in the lecture, but also students were more active, collaborative and focussed during the lesson in both the theoretical and practical elements.

Secondly, students learning quality was better. Students were able to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the topics than previously, and they were able to engage in better discussions when reflecting by applying their experiences to the learning.

Thirdly, through student feedback it was clear that the lesson aligned with student expectations. Several students commented that they feel there should be more of these sessions as that is what they expected the programme to be.

Additionally, this approach had a major positive influence on my own teaching practice. I personally felt more engaged and confident in my teaching when I tried to facilitate the learning over controlling it.

Overall, the observations support the idea that experiential learning is highly effective in creative disciplines such as filmmaking. The experience also demonstrated the importance of integrating practical elements into lessons. For example, during this lesson I implemented a short task of active listening and asking open-ended questions in preparation for the interviews the students will need to conduct as part of the module. The feedback was extremely positive, and it was clear that this was more impactful for their learning than if I had simply lectured at them for an extended period of time.

Furthermore, it is important to summarise the limitations of this research which are:

The small scale. This research was limited to a single cohort which is good as a starting point but ultimately limits the extent of understanding that is possible.

No formal primary research. No interviews, surveys or numerical data such as grades were gathered, meaning that the recommendations are predominantly based on subjective observations.

Cannot confirm impact on assessment outcomes. While it can be strongly suggested, it cannot be definitively claimed that enhanced learner engagement positively enhances learner outcomes. This would be a strong next step for further research.

Section 7

This brings us to section 7, the recommendations that I have developed as a result of this action research that would inform a revised plan for a second cycle of the action research spiral.

Firstly, there needs to be further research conducted.

I would recommend expanding the scope of the research to include more cohorts and creative disciplines beyond filmmaking.

I would recommend exploring the impact of scaffolded learning on assessment outcomes when paired with experiential learning.

I would recommend the collection of primary research data to strengthen claims and recommendations and explore the implications of this research on learners academic success.

Secondly is the recommendation to explore blended teaching approaches.

I would recommend those teaching in creative disciplines should develop an approach to implementing practical elements that avoid time and resource restrictions. Context to this is that I acknowledge that despite the observable positive impacts of this action research, this was performed for one cohort at a time where the other levels of study were not on site. This recommendation comes from acknowledging that there are three levels that study simultaneously, and therefore there will naturally be resource restrictions, so there needs to be an approach for maintaining the ability to having practical elements in a lesson that can be achieved regardless of resource availability.

And thirdly, I recommend a stronger consideration for learner styles in lesson and course planning. This is mostly for my own practice; however, this recommendation would be applicable to a wide variety of educators. This also extends into allowing learner styles to positively influence planning and development which links to supporting learner autonomy.

And finally, section 8, to conclude this poster presentation.

In conclusion, this research suggests that increasing practice-based learning can significantly improve student engagement in higher education filmmaking.

It supports the use of experiential learning and student-centred approaches, which align closely with the needs and expectations of creative learners.

However, further research is needed to fully understand the long-term impact, particularly in relation to academic success and assessment outcomes.

Ultimately, rebalancing theory and practice and rethinking the role of the lecturer can lead to a more engaging and effective learning experience.

Thank you for your time, and here is also my reference list that I have lifted directly from my action research essay that has informed the ideas presented in this project.

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