

Report on the Learning with Moving Images Seminar, Malahide May 22nd-May 23rd 2008

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There has been a long-standing educational interest in the potential of pictures and moving images to enhance student learning. At different times over the last one hundred years, this interest has been reflected in educators firm belief in the power of pictorial flashcards, the film projector, television and the contemporary interest in digital video. This interest in DV in education is part of a now decade long investment in ICTs in Northern Ireland (NI) and Republic of Ireland (RoI) (Austin and Conway, 2005; Austin and Anderson, 2007; Lei, Conway and Zhao, 2007; Marshall and Anderson, 2008). In this historical context given the more interactive and dynamic features of DV compared to previous more static image-projecting technologies, what is its potential in teaching and teacher education?

The SCoTENS *Learning with Moving Images: Digital Video in Education and Teacher Education* seminar took place in the Grand Hotel, Malahide on May 22nd and 23rd 2008. Hosted by Joe O'Hara and Conor Sullivan of Dublin City University, Linda Clarke and Roger Austin of the University of Ulster and Paul Conway of University College Cork the seminar was attended by seventeen practitioners, from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The participants represented a broad range of organisations including Universities, Teacher Training Colleges, Education and Library Boards and NGO's.

As with previous SCoTENS-supported ICT seminars (Austin and Conway, 2005; Austin, Conway, Graffin and O'Hara, 2007), the two days combined a series of inputs from sector leaders with an opportunity for the group to share ideas, experiences and hopes relating to the use of digital video (DV) in education and teacher education. An initial input from the organising group seeking to explore the general terrain of DV use North and South included a report by Linda Clarke on a pilot project in which student teachers were given the opportunity to undertake critical reflection on their practice using a video diary format (Clarke, in press). This was followed by two focused inputs. The first, facilitated by Paul Conway of UCC and Mathias Fiedler of DICE, sought to examine DV as an enabler of classroom teaching and research. The second focused input provided by Bernard McCloskey of the Northern Ireland Screen Commission, examined the implications for learning when using moving images across a range of educational settings.

The formal inputs were complemented by a number of structured discussion sessions where participants were asked to reflect on:

- Their current use of ICT in their professional practice
- Their current use of DV in their professional practice
- The changes in their practice in recent years

- The challenges that have been faced when attempting to integrate DV into their practice

Perhaps unsurprisingly there were a wide range of responses to the questions posed. With regards to the use of ICT in current educational practice North and South, what was particularly noticeable was the ubiquity of technology in all aspects of teaching and learning. While it might be argued that the seminar participants were enthusiasts who could be expected to be early adopters, the wide ranging discussions that took place indicated that ICT has become embedded in most institutions and has been adopted and adapted by staff in a range of settings. Common applications included:

- Use of core functionalities such as e-mail to communicate with students and colleagues
- Development of an online repository of resources for ITE and CPD course participants in their own subject areas
- Use of the range of functionalities provided by VLE's to facilitate discussion, reflection, creation and sharing of resources

One of the participants summarised the place of ICT in their professional practice as follows, "It's all ICT" while another stated that "ICT is everywhere, from e-mail to blogging, from VLE's to spreadsheets there is no way I could get my job done and prepare my students for their professional placements without it. While we don't often appreciate it, we wouldn't be where we are without it!"

Again, the discussion relating to the use of and the change in DV usage on the island of Ireland threw up a range of experiences. While all participants indicated that they made use of DV, their differing organizational needs led to a range of patterns and styles of integration. Thus, for example, those who worked in teacher support agencies and directly with schools had a focus that included aspects of media education, exploring the wider role played by digital media in society and helping students and teachers examine the technology with a critical and informed eye. They were also interested in examining the curricular implications of integrating DV as a technology into the everyday life of a school and finally they discussed the skill set needed for all stakeholders when attempting to integrate DV into educational settings.

Participants working in other sectors, perhaps most particularly the ITE sector, shared many of these interests they were also seeking to explore the potential of DV to enhance student teachers mastery of core teaching capabilities. This has resulted in many teacher education institutions integrating DV into microteaching and other skills development programmes. It has also seen a number of organisations using DV to bring vignettes from the 'real classroom' into the ITE programmes in an original and challenging manner. Finally student teachers, and indeed all teachers who have had the opportunity to engage with the organisations represented at the seminar, are being encouraged to develop their own materials using DV and to integrate them into their own professional practice. This requires educators not only to master the technology but also to understand the learning and curriculum challenges posed by the integration of DV into their everyday teaching lives.

The challenges of using DV were many and varied and again many were sector specific. However a number of common themes emerged. One of the major challenges faced was the perennial one of resources. While a number of participants specifically mentioned that they had sufficient resources in the DV area, most indicated that they struggled to meet the increasing demand for cameras, pc's, server space etc while budgets and available time stay static or indeed shrink. In some ways this is the most common problem faced by any organisation seeking to integrate technology in a meaningful way and it is one that has been noted by previous SCoTENS conferences and publications. There was a general sense that where problems emerged institutions and individuals sought to address them to the extent that it was possible but didn't let obstacles stop them experimenting and innovating.

A second set of challenges centred around needs of those accessing the services provided. While most participants expressed a feeling that the core technological skills of many, although by no means all, had improved in recent years there were broader concerns around the pedagogical and epistemological challenges being posed. For many taking part in the seminar, DV seemed to offer an opportunity to restructure the student – teacher relationship by allowing students become genuine creators of artefacts and by extension knowledge. While most could see the possibilities inherent in such an approach there were real concerns about how this might be realised. For some, the major challenge revolved around selling the potential of DV to a range of audiences who quite often came from different educational cultures with at times competing priorities. These included student teachers who only wished to get through training, experienced teachers whose own professional outlook did not necessarily wish to incorporate a new approach defining learning relationships in classrooms and colleagues in a range of organisations who might not agree with a restructuring of the pedagogical approach being promoted.

Another common challenge was posed by the need to develop critical interpretive skills when dealing with a technology that is rapidly expanding in terms of availability. As one participant put it “everyone has a phone, most can take videos, many can manipulate them and a lot come from families where video has been part of their everyday life. The problem we face is helping decide what is useful and what is not. Should be easy but then there is YouTube ...”. In attempting to summarise these concerns a number of participants indicated that they felt that what was needed was a new digital literacy that needed to incorporate all aspects of technology usage and that should inform any future use of DV in educational settings.

The final part of the seminar saw the facilitators introduce the idea of developing a website specifically focused on supporting DV use in educational settings both North and South. There was a broad welcome for this and a range of suggestions were made with regards to possible content. In general it was felt that the site should include sections on

- The utilisation and production of DV
- Visual literacy and the language of the moving image
- Equipment audits – including needs analysis, costings etc

- Ethical issues – including WebWise, safety issues
- Links to projects on the island, in the EU and in the worldwide educational community
- Accessing funding

Two other suggestions involved the establishment of a SCoTENS presence on YouTube and the facilitation of a discussion forum on the site. While there was interest in both of these, it was suggested that further investigations take place regarding the feasibility in terms of the former and the housekeeping issues that often arise when trying to create a vibrant discussion space online.

The eventual outcome of the discussions relating to the site was a commitment on the part of the organisers to design and pilot one by the time of the next SCoTENS annual conference.

References

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