Chapter 6

The Effectiveness of Streaming Media Clips in Skills Teaching: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we present a small-scale comparative study into the use of streaming media Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs) in skills teaching. We consider the use of streaming digital video clips in the teaching of complex technical skills to Fashion Design students in large class sizes, drawing a comparison with the face-to-face demonstration model in widespread use in our curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

With the increase in UK undergraduate student numbers over the last five years, the three-year BA (Hons) Fashion Design course at Birmingham City University Institute of Art and Design, UK, has increased in size quite considerably, from 67 first-year students in the 2003-4 academic year to 135 in 2008-9. With much larger year groups, difficulties have emerged in the delivery of certain key technical aspects of the course, particularly in the area of pattern cutting.

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PATTERN CUTTING: THE MOVE FROM 2D TO 3D

Pattern cutting is the stage in fashion design where preparation of the finished garment begins. During this stage, the pattern cutter interprets the designer’s sketch in order to draw and cut out paper patterns. These are in turn used to mark and then cut fabric pieces for subsequent sewing into garments. Once this skill is learned, students can transform their design ideas from sketches into fully fitted garments – it is the stage where the move from 2D to 3D takes place.
Students are taught the basics of pattern cutting during the first year of the course, enabling this process to begin. They learn 120 different pattern cutting adaptations, starting with simple bust dart manipulation working through to the more complex collar and rever drafting. When the individual adaptations are combined in different sequences the particular details determine the final form and look of a garment. Due to their number, their complexity, and the fact that they are used only at this particular stage in the process, many of the more esoteric adaptations tend to be easily forgotten, and students often seek out tutors for additional guidance in this area throughout the three years of the course.

Typically, pattern cutting is taught in a workshop setting, with a tutor demonstrating individual adaptations to the whole class. After a demonstration, each student is required to repeat the process at the cutting table facilitated by the tutor, thereby reinforcing the techniques taught to memory.

**CLASS SIZE CONSIDERATIONS**

We divide the year group into smaller teaching groups of between 25 and 30 students to create a more personalised learning experience. However, difficulties are evident in the demonstration-based teaching of pattern cutting even to these smaller groups, as students can find themselves unable to adequately view the skill demonstrations, hindering their ability to perform the skills after the demonstration has ended.

Methods that would allow all students to view the skill demonstrations clearly were sought, and so the development of short video clips presenting the individual pattern cutting adaptations was begun. We filmed each adaptation from the pattern cutter’s point of view, showing the demonstrator using pens, scissors and glue to mark, cut and stick the pattern. We shot close-up views of more intricate processes for clarity. After editing, all clips were dubbed with a voice-over narration explaining each step of the process. A simple controller offering play, pause, fast-forward and rewind was added prior to use. All 120 video clips were then presented to students online in a structured series of modules using Moodle – the Birmingham City University Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

The video clips were originally intended to augment the face-to-face teaching sessions as an aide memoir used either during the module or afterwards. However, a stream of positive feedback from students who had used the clips provoked a further question: Could we use the clips to replace the demonstrations? And so our research question became: Is student performance using video clips as good as or better than face-to-face classroom teaching?

**SKILLS TEACHING**

There is little written regarding teaching practical skills to large class sizes in higher education, much of the literature on the teaching of large numbers of students seeks to address the problems associated with teaching theoretical topics within a lecture or seminar setting. Although splitting the larger lecture or seminar class into groups, for small group discussions or solving problems, as seen in Frederick (1987) is commonly advocated, this strategy would not support teaching of the practical or technical areas covered within the Fashion Design course. The main problem in the teaching of this material is the effect of group size on the students’ ability to understand the subject matter being demonstrated.

Newberry (2003) recommends that Fashion Design courses should limit their annual intake to “25 students or less, if teaching is to be effective.” This makes sense when taking into account the need to teach the practical and technical elements of such courses, as demonstrating skills to more than this number of students at a time becomes difficult. However, the advice sits in tension with