

Humanizing e-lecturers and engaging online writing students via dialogic video

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This paper reports on a study of integrating instructor-produced video ‘profcasts’ (Edirisingha, Salmon & Fothergill, 2007) into all 12 units of an online Master of Arts in Writing delivered asynchronously. While the value of short, targeted, quickly-made podcasts and extensive streamed video lectures in educational contexts has been researched (Williams, Birch & Hancock, 2012), few studies consider how customized videocasts supplement and complement core content to create engaging units of learning that learners value. Instead of producing instructivist, sage-on-stage, reiterative lectures, the Writing team filmed lecturers in semi-spontaneous dialogues to create critically challenging interactive experiences. The teaching and learning challenge is deeper than humanizing e-lecturers; it is about creating sustainable interfaces drawing on unique human capital: the lecturers as future-makers. It is a journey of creating enduring and impactful resources. Foregrounded by a literature review, this paper presents qualitative data from students and staff responding to the question of how valuable dialogic videos are to students’ experiences as online students of Writing. In addition to confirming students appreciate the humanizing of lecturers, data shows video makes ideas more accessible to visual learners and more engaging overall. Most importantly, informal dialogues with their exchanges of ideas clarify written course materials, supporting learning while helping to future-proof the program in a time of change.

Keywords: Audiovisual materials; Education; online teaching and learning; Writing

Introduction: The need for audiovisual dialogues

In an age where technology must constantly respond to change, e-educators play a major role in delivering, maintaining and sequencing authentic, engaging and reusable learning objects within cohesive pedagogical frameworks (Juwah, 2006). The conception of online learning environments as comprising a motivating array of dynamic multimedia resources has effectively led to a new culture of learning. Within this culture, e-learners potentially face nearly unlimited resources and multiple possibilities for interconnectivity (Thomas & Brown, 2011). This culture provides ‘environments that are bounded yet provide complete freedom of action within those boundaries’ (Thomas & Brown, 2011, p.18). Absent, though, are opportunities for imagining the lecturer as either a cohesive pedagogical presence or a thinking human being. As Fowler and Mayes argued in 1999, *who* learners learn from is crucial in constructivist environments mediated by technology.

Educationalists in disciplines such as Writing strive to create sustainable learning environments within their disciplines; but at the same time the investment learners have in developing their identities as writers depends on trust (Andrew & Arnold, 2011). Writing learners need to develop trust in their peers and tutor, and this involves getting to know them. This paper proposes an effective way to get to know the tutors while creating authentic, engaging and reusable learning objects: Dialogic ‘profcasts’ (Edirisingha, Salmon & Fothergill, 2007). These exemplify the role of innovation in online teaching and learning in the discipline of Writing, and highlight the need for the human in the Humanities. Whatever the discipline, educationalists need to be aware of their roles as future-makers: creating reusable resources that continue to engage target learners. To cite Diana Laurillard’s (2002) comment on teachers as future-makers in a world where universities need to future-proof themselves: ‘as the new technology requires, as the knowledge industry requires, and as students demand — then it follows that academics must become researchers in teaching’ (p.22).

This paper reports a case study focusing on integrating customized, pedagogical audiovisuals into an online Master of Arts in Writing delivered asynchronously at Swinburne University. Foregrounded by an investigation into previous studies of using audio-videos, podcasts and profcasts to enhance learning and a description of the project, this paper presents qualitative data from 26 students and 8 staff responding to the question of the value of customized profcasts to their learning experience. The study is similar in nature to that of Stodel, Thompson and MacDonald (2006), who discovered that the elements of F2F learning online students miss most are the robustness of online dialogue, spontaneity and improvisation, perceiving and being perceived, getting to know others, and learning to learn online. This study hypothesizes that informal dialogues with their exchanges of ideas model robust online dialogue, offer natural spontaneity and provide a visual image of teaching presence

where learners can ‘perceive’ their teachers, getting to know them in the process. This study investigates how such interventions support the learning that characterizes a Writing program.

Both research into online learning in asynchronous modalities and our own student evaluations indicate that a key challenge lies in learners’ perception of the e-lecturer as *faceless* (Flecksenstein, 2005; Stodel et al., 2006). Hence, the teaching team decided to incorporate audiovisual representations of lecturers enacting their knowledge and being themselves as learning objects. In addition to introducing faces – and voices and body language – the team wanted to portray the personalities of all teaching staff, both lecturers and tutors. The team followed the hypothesis that content is more engaging when it is delivered by personalities rather than figures. As practitioner-researchers, team members built their hunch by reflecting on the use of audiovisual dialogues to build perspectives in ‘real world’ creative enterprises: The addition of ‘extras’, particularly interviews with personnel, to the media of DVD and Blu-Ray adds value to the experience of those experiencing the art form. Similarly, the interviews with artists in the Metropolitan Opera’s High Density (HD) cinema series (<http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/liveinhd/LiveinHD.aspx>) adds exegetical value to the experience of viewers. ‘Exegetical value’ can be understood thus: learning about being involved in creative enterprise from insiders’ perspectives produces an intertextuality that elucidates both the creation itself and the act of creation. In Writing, this, to return to Laurillard (2002) and Stodel et al. (2006), is what students demand.

At the program level, the team aimed to create dynamic learning objects to motivate and provoke students through the incorporation of the human into the electronic. At an institutional level the challenge is deeper than merely proving lecturers are not, as several students commented, ‘cyberbots’; it’s about creating more future-proofed and sustainable learning interfaces drawing on unique human capital. This capital comprises the teaching staff themselves. It’s the personalities that make the materials unique and different from other institutions’ products. Instead of producing streamed talking-head lectures replicating lecture material in a sage-on-stage manner, the team decided to have lecturers and tutors in dialogic conversation to create a more socially constructivist, more challenging, interactive televisual experience for students.

This paper plays into a discernible research gap around non-reiterative customized audiovisual production for online delivery, particularly in the postgraduate levels in Writing. ‘Non-reiterative’ refers to materials that do not replicate the materials of ‘the lecture; or ‘the text’, but which are spontaneously co-constructed dialogically by specialists in the field. Few studies in the wake of Edirisingha, Salmon and Fothergill’s ‘profcasts’ (2007) have, however, considered how audiovisual materials designed for asynchronous use can be used to supplement and complement core lecture material to create more a more engaging and sustainable learning interface.

Background: The project

Swinburne University, allied with Open Universities Australia (OUA), has delivered its 12-unit online MA in Writing since 2002. Since that time many other institutions have produced their own, often competing, online Writing programs. The original iteration of the program used HTML lectures together with mostly static, lecturer-led monologues paraphrasing these lectures. These are delivered via the Learning Management System (LMS) Blackboard. Several lectures contained interviews, where lecturers captured writers in the workplaces and created stretches of authentic, two-way, situated dialogue. These, but not the talking heads, were well regarded in student evaluations of units.

In 2009 it was the institution’s and the discipline’s challenge to create unique pedagogical features to individuate its product, future-proofing the program and competitive advantages and migrating from the lecturer-unfriendly Dreamweaver to ‘easy-to-use’ Contribute (<http://www.adobe.com/au/products/contribute.html>). As part of a *carpe diem* project involving lecturers, information technology specialists and librarians, the goal was to draw on lecturers’ potential as effective future-makers and update the suite incorporating insights from research and experience. We knew more about online praxis, how learners construct knowledge and what media are most effective in creating multi-dynamic weekly modules scaffolded into 12-week sequences of learning according to constructivist patterns. We began with an audit of our assets.

The Writing discipline’s most identifiable assets are its staff - published, industry-based teaching and writing professionals – and ‘how they get their acts together’, their ‘Discourses’ and ‘ways of being’. The terms ‘how people get their acts together’. ‘Discourses’ and ‘ways of being’ come from literacy scholar James P. Gee (1990), who argues that effective learning occurs most readily in situated contexts, within authentic environments. It happens among real identities being themselves; that is, using naturally the big-D Discourse of their discourse community or community of practice. For Gee, ‘Discourses’ are:

Ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities by specific groups ... They are 'ways of being' in the world. (Gee, 1990, pp. 2, 161)

The goal in the Writing program was to create authentic audiovisual materials featuring the university's unique teaching staff using their 'Discourses' naturally, as we observed in the well-evaluated early interviews. It is about 'ways of being'; about making Discourses accessible. In the logistically simpler audio-podcasting championed by Salmon and Erdirisingha (2008), the human voice has power. Situated literacies theory enables us to argue for the pedagogical power of the contextualized ('situated') whole person over that of the faceless voice. Further, Sian Bayne (2004) suggested 'embodying' the lecturer adds value to online learning. As analysis of the views of one student in Bayne's study of embodiment in cyberspace suggests, 'the body of the teacher ... becomes a locus for the aspirations of the learner' (p.111).

In representing the teaching staff as embodied, this study draws on Bourdieu's (1977) understanding of thought and discipline knowledge as embedded in embodied practices. The spontaneous nature of the spoken word profcasts allows writer-lecturers to access and project what Gee would consider their 'ways of being' or what Bourdieu are their living practices, sensibilities, modes of speech, manners and tastes. In the process, the team marks itself as belonging to a particular social group, that of the Writing discipline. The lecturer identities the profcasts convey aligns with Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*, marking the writer-teachers as representatives of the social order of Writing. In the eyes of students, this builds trust and credibility.

In a study of possible relations between text lectures and audio or audiovisual postcasts, McGarr (2009) identified three relations: *substitutional*, *supplementary* and *creative*. In the findings of the study, the first of these is ineffective while the second and third can affect active learning. Accordingly, the Writing team wanted the profcasts to work as *supplements* or *complements* to the canonical 'printed' lectures produced by the specialist lecturer in each module. The nature of the relation between written lecture and audiovisual supplement/complement is crucial since Copley (2007) valorised 'supplementary' audio and visual podcasts for on-campus students. We define 'supplements' as working alongside the lecture, bringing in additional perspectives, examples and materials, while 'complements' offer a contrasting or alternative interrogative position, effectively deconstructing the canonical nature of 'the lecture'. Clearly, the goal is to create more balanced, engaging and critically challenging technology-generated materials. They not only appeal to a wide range of learning orientations, but they also increase accessibility and flexibility since the audiovisuals can be downloaded as either video or sound files and played on portable mobile devices.

In analysing the role of conversation in constructivist learning, Allen (2005) wrote: 'One of our greatest learning and teaching tools within higher education is language. By this we mean genuine dialogue not monologue' (p.253). Similarly, the team chose to use dialogues rather than monologues to capture a more engaging and interactive audiovisual pedagogical sequence involving natural, yet organized, conversational turn-taking. The dialogues can reflect a range of dynamics:

Peer-on-peer: A balanced two-way conversation, discussion or debate with equal turn-taking on a key topic.

Interviewer-to-expert: In cases where a specialist or industry-based guest lecturer participates, they are given more talking time through the use of targeted interviewer cues with a lecturer.

Member-to-apprentice: Sessional tutors who have been students are interviewed for lecture 1 in the sequences of 12 to clarify aspects of the unit's key assignments. This brings a voice closer to that of the students and better targets their potential concerns. This also affords sessional tutors visibility and positions them as important identities and voices in the pedagogical team. Students can relate to sessional who, like themselves, are positioned as apprentices to a desired community of enquiry.

Platonic symposium: The Platonic dialogue, where lecturers take on expert but sometimes dogmatic and controversial positions (for instance about the role and value of critical theory for writers) is a valuable pedagogical device because it involves the use of devil's advocacy and the creation of multiple positions. Its goal is to emulate, anticipate and give voice to the range of objections and contrasting opinions students may have. Introductions to these dialogues contextualize what follows so students clearly understand that lecturers are representing positions that may not be their own.

Panel discussion: Two 'experts' are interviewed in relation to particular cues relevant to the unit.

Not only do the voices vary, countering the boredom that may come with listening to monologues, but there is also room for multiple perspectives. The dialogues are based on cues negotiated in advance by the two participants so that broad subject areas and trajectories of discussion are agreed. The performances, however, are unrehearsed, spontaneous and authentic: 'They are 'ways of being'' in the world' (Gee, 1990, p.161). The

semi-scripted nature of the enterprise allows for interesting opportunistic digressions while keeping the timing of the interviews controlled: the target length is 12 minutes, a length designed to avoid both outstaying its welcome and being mistaken for a lecture substitute.

From 2009 to 2012, the recordings were variously made in a once-camera blue-screen studio or a two-camera television studio and required the help of a technician or technicians who operated the camera(s) and organized postproduction. The more expensive two-camera set-up allowed for close-ups to be interspersed with long-shorts for dynamic variation, while the one-camera set-up is static, requiring more dynamism and movement from the lecturers. Postproduction involves editing, the superimposition of a suitable backdrop and the interspacing of introductory sequences, captions and inter-titles and leads to a quality branded product. The Writing discipline remodeled the units between 2009 and 2012 and needed to evaluate the usefulness of these pedagogical innovations. Informed in general by action research's reflective learning cycles, the researcher sought evaluative responses from two stakeholder groups: students and tutors. The question asked was open: 'How valuable are the videos in the Writing discipline's delivery of its Writing subjects?'

Literature review

Koumi (2006) surveyed the potential of video as an e-learning tool under three key categories: *assisting cognitive learning and skills development*; *providing experiences unavailable through other media* and *nurturing feelings and motivations*. This drew attention to the potential of video resources. Valorizing discussion-embedded video lectures, Haga (2002) argued 'watching a video enables learners to study as if they were participating in traditional classroom' (p.120). Athey (2010, online) suggested video infuses asynchronous e-Learning with human interaction and visual demonstrations that can be lost outside of live instruction. Berner and Adams (2003) noted that while adding video to audioslides is 'expensive' it also 'personalizes' learning (p.190) particularly where lecturers are more expressive. In one rare study of bespoke audiovisuals, Tantrarungroj (2011) demonstrated the capacity of learning interfaces utilising streaming video to improve learning performance in neuroscience by improving retention of content knowledge.

The majority of relevant studies on podcasting investigate practice-based applications within specific learning environments. Larkin (2010) concluded that audio podcasts represent 'an opportunity to add value to existing teaching and educational strategies' (p.247). Usefully, the study challenges online teachers to ensure that lectures not merely used to convey information but 'to support the transformative nature of real learning' (p.248). Copley (2007) reported positive student evaluations of AV podcasts, while Lonn and Teasley (2009) found little evidence they help teaching. Lazzari (2009) and Demetriadis and Pombortsis (2007) see minor impact on grades when students are lectured via AV lectures. In a medical radiation program, Scutter, Stupans, Sawyer and King (2010) found podcasts were reported to improve students' learning, partly because of their ability to be replayed at leisure, even though this learning may be of a passive and superficial variety. For them podcasts were substitutional – 'the uploading of lectures onto the subject website' (p.180). It is unsurprising the researchers remain unconvinced about the value of podcasts for teaching deep and abstract concepts but enthusiastic about their intermittent value to clarify key points. Demetriadis and Pombortsis (2007), too, stress their usefulness in knowledge acquisition, but not knowledge construction. Peden and Domask (2011) showed 'there is little evidence regarding the relationship between podcasts and student engagement' (p.175) and a lack of compelling evidence that they impact student learning outcomes.

The value and applicability of podcasting with MP3s in distance learning is clear in research-based studies of the 'podological' use of podcasts to improve reflective capacity, promote dialogue and maximise the transference of skills (Salmon & Erdirisingha, 2008), amongst other things. These studies show teaching using podcasting can impact student learning by:

supporting organizational aspects of learning; developing positive attitudes towards the lecturer, bringing in an informality and fun to formal learning; helping with independent learning; enabling deep engagement with learning material; providing access while being mobile (Edirisingha, Salmon & Fothergill, 2007, p.134).

Two of their findings are the themes *Sense of informality in learning* and *Deeper engagement with learning material and a deeper understanding*. Lee and Chan's (2007) discovered podcasts can help decrease feelings of isolation and increase sense of community. The enthusiastic work of teaching practitioners like Guertin (2010) suggest a wide range of creative possibilities for activity-based and task-based learning using podcasts in weekly discussions, opening the door to creating community. Broadly, any discipline can create and use profcasts to target their units' learning outcomes, and create effective tools for review. There are clear guidelines about their

instructional design and they can use video (Edirisingha, Salmon & Fothergill, 2007; Salmon, Erdirisingha, Mobbs, Mobbs & Dennett, 2008). In a multimedia communication program, Lazarri (2008) concluded the use of podcasting 'in an appropriate and challenging educational context can influence the quality of the learning experience and help students achieve good results' (p.33).

The use of web-based learning technologies (WBLT) such as Lectopia has produced many studies, most dealing with face-to-face (F2F) versus flexible/ blended deliveries. Most report little difference in efficiency. Demestriadis and Pombortsis (2007) suggest recordings made with WBLT could be valuable in online and blended deliveries, but recommend 'thematically-focused, short e-lectures that need not be regularly updated' (p.148). Like Demestriadis and Pombortsis, Brechy & Ogilby (2008) argue that so long as they match student learning styles, e-lectures are beneficial, being course-related, replayable, flexible and portable. Bennett and Maniar (2008) warn videoed lectures make learning unengaging and hinder independent learning. Bennett, Maniar, Clark and King (2008) report supplementary podcasts in on-campus programs add value for students.

Little of the research, Williams, Birch and Hancock (2012), write, tells us more than that students like them (for their time-flexibility and replay-ability) but that they can lack engagement and prevent the lecturer's personality from shining through. Many argue their mere existence mitigates against lecture attendance, but, like Larkin (2010), emphasise that perceiving the use of WBLT as a *substitute* is counter-intuitive. Harnessing its potential as a non-reiterative *supplement* or *complement*, as this study of audiovisual profcasts does, is more the point. It's about deepening the learning experience and increasing engagement through multimedia. Williams et al. (2012) conclude that students using recordings as a substitute are less successful than those viewing them as a complement. This insight is useful in application to designing units for online delivery: the meaningful relation of other material placed beside 'the lecture' needs to be clear.

Methodology

This study reports on the evaluation stage of an action research project investigating the value of an innovation – dialogic profcasts – in response to a key problem in the teaching and learning environment: the need to future proof the Writing program while integrating lecturers' 'lived Discourses' into our learning environment. In action research, reflecting on experience involves problematising and meta-thinking and is a crucial source of authentic data in teachers' lives leading to theories for practice (Burns, 2010). These practices accord with Little's (2012) description of action research: 'as teachers continue to teach, implement new methods and resources, and reflect on the results, the goal is to improve student learning' (p.70). This action research uses a method characteristic of case studies. Case studies are detailed contextual analyses of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships and relate to everyday experience. The study's main method is a single-event case study generating discourse involving 26 student and seven tutor responses to a directed cue.

Procedure

Twenty-six students and seven tutors voluntarily replied to a one-question email survey sent to 55 students enrolled in semester 1, 2012 and the entire cohort of 10 tutors. Respondents wrote freely, cued by the following question: 'How valuable are the videos in the Writing discipline's delivery of its Writing subjects?' All students and tutors gave permission to cite them anonymously. Accordingly, they are described as student 1-26 (S1-26) and tutor 1-7 (T1-7). In this methodology, counting responses as they emerge does not have statistical significance, but indicates to the researcher issues closest to the forefront of respondents' consciousness.

Data analysis and presentation

In isolating and presenting themes, the researcher uses the qualitative descriptive methodology Sandelowski (1995) employed in analysing naturalistic texts in nursing contexts. She described a method of closely reading material, identifying key storylines to understand everyday practices and underlining key phrases 'because they make some as yet inchoate sense' (p.73). This method draws on recognized qualitative word-based and scrutiny-based techniques of readerly observation, and has allegiances with thematic analysis and narrative enquiry. The findings are presented as themes and discussed in the light of issues raised in the literature review.

This is a small-scale project with a data set from tutors triangulating that of students and informed by the researcher's reflective observations as writer-teacher-researcher. It's an example of how teachers might be future-makers by applying to their own practice the analytic phases of *immersion*, *incubation*, *illumination*, *explication* and *creative synthesis* (Moustakas, 1994).

Because this research occurs in the context of creative arts, there is more awareness of the researchers' implicitness and agency, to echo Bakhtin (1990). I have created and appeared in more than 40 educational videos, and my educational philosophies, epistemological stances and understandings of ontology impact on the project. Concurring with Richardson (1994), I believe my researcher and lived selves as writer-educator are inseparable; indeed I have already impacted on the responses of my subjects due to the wording of my cue and my personal history of communications with my respondents and, as with all researchers, I am part of my data. Although the findings merely report the themes, the methodology used forces me to storify them.

Findings

Theme 1: 'Not cyberbots – real!'

The first theme groups together a range of ideas related to the benefits for students of seeing their tutors. T1 sums it up neatly:

One of the difficulties frequently discussed by online students is the facelessness of their encounters. The video not only puts a face to their tutors but also a personality, allowing students to see themselves as mentored by real people rather than faceless representatives of a disembodied authority.

S5 wrote with ironic tongue-in-cheek: *They were not cyberbots out there with automated course content. My tutors were real!* T6 reiterates the metaphor: *It's important for them to know we are not automatons!*. S17 adds: *There are humans on the other end of this course after all!*

1.1 Know our tutors' personality

Students and tutors positively comment on videos' ability to personal the lecturer and the adjectives *real* and *personal* resound in the responses, along with the verbs *human* and *meet*. *I find it personally valuable to put faces and voices to the people on the other end of the lesson* (S14) is a typical response. 'It gives us a sense of character' writes S19. As T7 points out, *in a real tutorial, you'd see your tutor's expressions and hear his or her thoughts, and you'd gain insight into the person*. The profcasts personal materials and allow personalities with *mannerisms* (S18) to shine: *There's a sense of their becoming real people with personalities, while lectures tend to show them at their self-conscious scholarly best* (T7). In addition to creating more authentic communication channels, the videos also allow access to 'voice': *The video component allows us to 'know' our tutors and lecturers a little better – tone of voice is very helpful in 'hearing' their messages* (S1). Over and above the tone of voice and its inflexions is the paralinguistic communication: S4 appreciates the paralinguistic *hand gestures* used as underlining and T4 mentions the *warm dynamic* lecturers exhibit on screen using what S15 calls *spontaneous exchanges of information*.

1.2 The casual complements the formal

The spontaneous, informal nature of conversations and discussions is also viewed as a positive and the adjectives *more interesting* and *more engaging* appear with iterations of this theme. S14 gives a typical description: *The informal nature of the interviews makes the video content more accessible*. The fact that they are casual discussions not formal lectures is mentioned in 14 responses. The casual nature allows the staff to *drop their guard and their passions to show* (T7) allowing students to access *extra bits and pieces beyond the content of the written lecture notes* (S15) and providing an *extra dimension* (T5). S6 writes: *To have a more casual discussion...is also useful and provides a backup to what we have been reading about*. The casual videos support the formal lectures. *Sometimes the informal view just clarifies a point not quite understood in the written lectures*. They also *assign a human identity to the 'ruling authority' in the learning transaction* (T1), meaning that the informal humanity projected augments the formality of the knowledge embodied in lectures, turning them into approachable 'mentors'. T4 adds the videos students favour *show a bouncing backwards and forwards of ideas between interviewees rather than the formal question and answer style* and that students need explicitly to know that videos are a complement not a substitute. The data suggests students do understand the complementary relation: *The video lectures always cover extra areas to the written lectures and do complement them quite well* (S17) and *add analysis to the written material* (S20).

1.3 Reducing isolationism

S23 argues videos are *a step forwards – they reduce the isolation of online studies*. Along with 8 others, S21 shares her experience of aloneness: *As a long distance student, my study would otherw be conducted in solitude with only the printed word for company*. The 'otherw' indicates a contextual reference to the role of the videos in creating a human presence in the learning suite. *While flexibility is a plus*, S21 continues, *the isolation can be*

at times a negative. T3 adds, *the online learning environment can be an isolating experience for many and the video lectures go some way to address this issue.*

Theme 2: 'Unlocking' understanding

2.1. Use of different media solidifies learning

When S22 writes videos *create a variety and helps stimulate learning*, she is one of 12 articulating the idea that triangulating learning materials with different media is a key strategy. The video dialogues help to unlock understanding: *listening to these discussions clarifies and expounds aspects of the learning material* (S21). The metaphor comes from S3, who says *the videos...have been key to my understanding* and requests more. (S4 wants more too and suggests Skype, with S7 wanting *video link ups*). S6 writes the videos *helped transform* (subject name) *from an unknown beast into a comfortable friend* and that the type of articulation they convey floors her. S13 tells a similar story:

In the discourse ... one or another of the two participants often reveal gems of ideas that motivate me and encourage me to become involved in the learning process in a way that would not be possible had I just read those same words on paper.

2.2. Variations in dynamics aid engagement

The contrast in dynamics between the lectures and the videos is an important subtheme, with the videos validated for being more *personal* and *direct* and lectures called *bland*. *They provide a great starting place in understanding and engaging with the material in the lecture*, says S9, who supposedly chooses to watch the video before reading the lecture. *They are a stepping stone to the provided learning materials*, writes T2. *Videos are a worthwhile learning tool that complement the written material and, with technology...there are many possibilities for the future...films, poetry readings and even links to Youtube* (T2). T5 points out, *interviews are easier to digest than reading lectures*. S20 concurs: *Some days my head is full of written words already and audio adds another dimension*. S23 explains why: *Videos contribute to a more rich and diverse study experience*. S20 gives an example: *I like the interaction where (lecturer) paraphrased one of (lecturer's) questions. It clarified ... the debate ... I'm still coming to grips with many new concepts.*

2.3. Consolidating moments of serendipity

Video exchanges can crystallise 'a-ha' moments. S14 writes, *I often pause the video and refer back to my notes and have the inevitable 'a-ha' moment*. T1 thinks that for some learning styles they better *encapsulate* key ideas. S10 describes changing her mind about her choices for the assignment as a result of one such spontaneous interchange and S11 realises what a *cop-out* she has been in avoiding journal writing as a research strategy. The scenarios described in the dialogues create stories and vignettes with which students can relate and project their own thinking. The fact that students often refer to the videos as resources in their weekly posts makes it clear to T2 that students really *connect to and engage with these videos-not only as a starter point for further discourse...but as a way to build connections with their tutors.*

Theme 3: Becoming part of the discussion

While videos cannot provide the same experience as being there, they can provide a simulacrum, making S9 feel *the same as we would if we were actually attending a university lecture in person*. S25 agrees: *It makes me feel I am attending a normal lecture...It gives me hope for the future of my own writing*. Feeling she is part of the discussion helps her to feel part of a future, imagined community of writing. S13 says *the videos allow me to feel we are on a journey of discovery together*. S2 finds the videos *amazing: I feel I can be part of the two-way discussions...It's more like a tutorial*. S2 goes on to speak of *immediacy* and *connectiveness* in contrast to autocue monologues. The 'inclusive' nature of the encounter is important for S21 and 10 others: *Watching the dynamic interchange between members of the staff is both insightful and effective.*

The visual nature of the material is the key here: *I believe that visual material contributes to a feeling of real life contact with the lecturers*. Ours is a visual age and, as S24 asserts, *we have a right as students to expect at the very least to have videos*. Three respondents state they are auditory learners, with S25 listening to the lectures *in the background* and finding it an effective way to learn.

Discussion

Using bespoke audiovisual dialogues involving teaching staff appears to have value as a teaching and learning innovation. As learning objects, they create a complementary and supplementary relation to formal lectures by using positive and casual interchanges. Their purpose and relation need to be explicit. They are 'non-reiterative' and not intended as pedagogical substitutes. They are a creative use of the medium, of the sort described in Guertin's (2010) study of podcasts. They foregrounding the 'Discourses' of teachers as unique learning capital that learners value because it humanizes lecturers and provides provocation and clarification.

Audiovisuals involving interacting academics are a way of engaging learners by employing different dynamics from print e-lectures. They also incorporate socialisation by giving lecturers faces and personalities, creating for many a feeling of 'being there'. This adds to the sense of social presence Stodel et al. (2006) identified as lacking in online learners' experience. For some students, dialogic videos help reducing isolationism. This study supports Lee and Chan's (2007) belief that podcasts help decrease feelings of isolation, specifically by showing lecturers are not cyberbots. While the study does not show they contribute to the increases sense of community Lee and Chan also saw, there is a clear sense that learners see podcasts' potential to humanize the lecturers and bring the university tutorial room into the online environment as engaging and valuable. Together with dynamically used discussion forums and the 'community of enquiry' pedagogy Stodel et al (2006) describe, they can be part of a teaching and learning package that promotes community (Andrew & Arnold, 2011). The fact that the profcasts are customized is testament both to the regard for students and to the program's need to futureproof itself with a pedagogical variation on the unique selling proposition. There are, unsurprisingly, no comments on the futureproofing value of the audiovisuals; only on their pedagogical value.

The study supports the claim that AV profcasts' multiplicity, flexibility and portability appeal to many learners. They enable a crystallisation of learning for some and an 'a-ha' moment for others and this suggests a more than superficial or passive engagement of the kind Scutter et al. report (2010). There is no evidence that the bespoke profcasts are unengaging or that they hinder independent learning, charges laid against WBLT. Where research on podcasts might tend to suggest they, too, are unengaging and add insufficient value, the Writing discipline's creation of dialogic profcasts suggests students are engaged and value their impact.

These media allow personalities to shine where it might be formalized or even appear haphazard in WBLT like Lectopia. Indeed, the findings concur with Edirisingha et al. (2007) and support two of the study's findings - *Sense of informality in learning* and *Deeper engagement with learning material and a deeper understanding*. The profcasts' tone of casualness and their participants' ability to discuss and debate, throwing the ball from one to the other, appeals to learners and creates a learning intervention that complements and supplements and certainly cements knowledge conveyed in lectures. The findings suggest the embodiment of the teaching staff serves as the kind of aspirational spur Bayne (2004) identified.

Conclusions

The profcasts described in this project have a number of unique features which impact on their value. The fact that their relation to the lecture is supplementary or complementary, adding alternative or different views and voices, is a part of their effectiveness. This supports studies by McGarr (2009), Copley (2007) and Larkin (2010), preferring a supplementary relation between podcasts and lecture materials. As supplements or complements, their relation to the lecture needs to be clearly conveyed in the curricula. They are not substitutes, and research suggests pedagogical interventions conveying similar information in a similar way lack value (Larkin, 2010; Williams et al., 2012). Their length – up to 12 minutes – is a virtue, as is the fact that they are dialogues, simulating the dynamics of a lively collegiality. Their ability to bear an interrogative relation to the lecture provides a space for critical thinking and reflection. Their potential to present a range of identities and 'ways of being', at the same time embodying *habitus*, is valuable too since it codifies the teaching staff as members of the Writing community to which the learners aspire. It is a way of valorising sessional staff through presence and representing those who are apprentices to the community of practice of the Writing discipline.

An insight into the *habitus* of lecturers is an insight into that of practicing academic-writers and a mirror into the students' imagined communities and aspirational goals. In this way, the profcasts connect the here and now with the aspirational futures of learners. They effectively model Gee's (1990) 'ways of being' by 'situating' the Discourse of lecturers in an accessible learning environment. For many of the writing students, getting to know the teaching staff via profcasts adds value to the online learning experience while providing materials that supplement and/or complement the written lectures. The authentic, embodied practices portrayed in the videocasts together with the 'ways of being' conveyed combine to create this engagement. As well as providing

engagement, they mark the MA in Writing as unique and contribute to future-proofing.

The adoption of the *carpe diem* process for creating and rewriting online units signals a team approach where the lecturer, not the instructional designer, generates sequences of content and where representations of teacher identities are as central as those of students. This study corroborates the idea that teacher identities can be used as tools for engaging pedagogically with students. It is possible for teachers to create interchanges which are involving and inclusive and which will last over time: teachers as future-makers, contributing to pedagogic and resourcing sustainability.

To foreground and even commodify the teaching staff as bearers of disciplinary and institutional banners is to move a long way from the online learning worlds of 1997 when McWilliam and Taylor noticed the teacher's 'material presence in the learning context' was represented almost as an 'impediment to learning, a stumbling block in the path of access to information' (p.2). The new culture of technology-mediated constructivist learning using multimedia learning objects needs to celebrate the *who* and not just the *how*.

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