Inclusive Assessment of 'Live Brief' Undergraduate Projects

Discipline:	Art - Animation
Student Numbers:	24

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Introduction and Context

Ours is a 4 year Level 8 BA programme in Animation, in IADT's Department of Film and Media, in our National Film School. Our 'Towards Professional Practice' module is a Stage 3, 15 credit, mandatory module. The module has been running (in modified versions) for over 10 years. Our student cohort is around 130 students, so Stage 3 of our programme (where our 'TPP' module sits), ranges from 30 to 40 students, very much small-group art, design and media education.

A key outcome from this module is that students get some real, authentic industry related experience. Whilst our DL832 Animation BA's 'Towards Professional Practice' module has, since its inception, envisaged work placement, internship and 'formal' links with industry, the reality has been that such formal links have proved to be difficult to establish and impossible to sustain.

We endeavoured to work with industry to ensure that our students get the industry experience that the programme requires but over time it became apparent that our programme's core problem was twofold. If students WERE to be 'formally' placed in industry, how could their learning be protected and enhanced and how could student learning be assessed and matched to module and programme learning outcomes? How might such assessment and feedback benefit and inform other students? Secondly, if students could not be 'placed in industry', how could 'real' projects be developed with external clients? How could student learning on such projects be assessed? If our students were working in project groups, surely this would complicate the assessment and feedback process further? Could individual learning in group projects be identified, assessed, guided and informed through feedback?

Our objective is to fairly, validly and reliably assess and provide feedback on our students' undergraduate learning, even in complex and challenging learning environments. In the process, we hoped to enhance our students' self-direction, their understanding of their own learning process, as well as their understanding of their assessment and our feedback. Every student's individual journey towards professional practice would be enhanced by such improvements to our process.

When placing undergraduate students in industry, we have used multiple methods to assess their learning on the placement experience including reflective journals and assessment 'in situ', whilst the industry placement is in progress. This has often been driven by industry, especially when there are sensitivities around Intellectual Property (IP) protection and non-disclosure. Animation and film studios are often working on other people's IP and they scrupulously protect such material.

In the past, we have asked students who have completed such placements to present to our broader student population. Such presentations are formally assessed by the programme team and formally matched to module and programme learning outcomes.

Whilst our DL832 Animation BA's 'Towards Professional Practice' module has always envisaged work placement, internship and 'formal' links with industry, the reality has been that such sustained formal linkages have proved to be almost impossible to establish and sustain. In particular issues around cost, IP protection, secrecy, non-disclosure and sustainability. This has led us to implementing 'live-briefs' as a solution to such industry placement challenges.

Live briefs

A viable alternative to placement IN industry is what Professor Susan Orr calls 'the live brief'. Our academic programme invites clients (often charities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)) into our programme, bringing their problems with them (often so-called 'wicked problems') and developing responses to these challenges with our students. Clients often bring in modest funding with their projects. Susan Orr says 'through live briefs, the students often get access to much higher levels of industry – to the top people' (briefing to IADT Film, Art and Creative Technology Faculty on staff Friday 8th June 2018). Not only do students get access to the clients, they also deal directly with other key stakeholders – especially patients and NGO service-users.

This is true Problem Based Learning, often working with very challenging and difficult subject matter. Students are encouraged to deal directly with the clients and with other stakeholders, to research, evolve, design, develop, present, manage and produce the project themselves, with guidance form the academic programme team where needed. With the clients, students decide on the subject matter, visual style, production solutions (hardware and software). Clients are encouraged to meet their student groups regularly, preferably face to face, in order to learn the development and communication process for themselves and, most importantly, in order to stay on top of project messaging.

Such work has learning for all sides, for the students, for the clients and for the academic programme. Such work is real research, because it takes challenging, 'wicked' problems and uses an interdisciplinary approach to evolve and develop real solutions. The solutions evolved can be practical and academic.

Our assessment and feedback of such 'group industry' projects began many years ago with a limited (but perfectly valid) 'industry' assessment model. The product (in our case the animation project produced with and for the client) was assessed. Each student group member was given the same grade for their work done on the project. However, we've long since moved to a more 'educational' grading and feedback model, very much based on guidance from IADT's Rebecca Roper and on methods highlighted in Palloff and Pratt's 'Assessing the Online Learner' (2008).

At two points in their project, (a formative point just over halfway through their project and a summative point just after the end of their project completion) students are encouraged to do individual Journal postings on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) where they self-assess and where they're allowed to suggest grades for their peers within their student project group. Students are asked to justify their grading choices (both self and peer) and are provided with our Faculty's 'Assessment Lexicon' (see Appendix below). At all times, an informal, measured and professional tone is encouraged in their Journal Postings.

As Palloff and Pratt (2008) note, any student self or peer assessment is 'carefully considered' by the programme team when developing each student's individual assessment and feedback. The student grading through Journals is crosschecked and collated with assessment information, formative and summative, from project presentations, weekly project meetings, client feedback and the assessment of the work itself (both process and product). Many times, the student observations (carefully anonymised) can be fed back to their peers.

An example

Let's take one case study example. H. arrived to us from RCSI with research she'd already been gathering for two years as part of a PhD project. H. first met with one of our programme lecturers, described the material she'd gathered and her plans for project dissemination. H. had built a modest dissemination budget into her research funding – always a good sign (many research projects only think about dissemination and communication at the end of their project, when all funds are exhausted).

When our Professional Practice module commenced, H. presented short text versions of 8 scenarios. The scenarios were based on H's research priorities – our students would eventually select 5 from the 8 projects. We asked each student group (5 students in each group) to tentatively select one of the 8 subjects. Within one week, the student groups pitched ideas about how they might propose to visualise their selected project. From that point onwards, H. met with each group in our animation studio once a week for the 8 weeks of the project, guiding the development of the visuals and always mindful of the authenticity of the 'voice' and project messaging. Even when our module lead lecturer was abroad on an Erasmus mobility project, the students' weekly meetings continued with the client. At 8 weeks, we asked the groups

to 'deliver' their draft versions of their project. The clients, including H. were invited to then view the projects over a couple of weeks (Christmas period), to provide written feedback (if they so wished) and to suggest any final changes, fixups for the students to complete before 'final' delivery and the end of the module's 12-week run. Here is some of H's feedback to the groups...

— From a client perspective, this team worked very professionally and clearly. They had a really clear vision for the project from the outset and gave an extremely impressive pitching presentation at the outset. That set the tone for the duration of the project and what was particularly impressive was how closely the final animation kept to the initial vision for it. C. held the role of producer/director so was my main point of contact – always ready and available and always clear in where the project was at. The rest of the team were able to step in, proactively when their producer/director was not available and clearly worked very hard and efficiently to create such a polished and professional piece of work. I appreciated everyone's openness to my feedback, which is so important in a project like this where we are trying to capture a sense of something complex. Well done all. It has been a pleasure to work with each of you.

— I really enjoyed working with this team. It was one of the only teams that didn't have a designated producer/director (certainly, not one I was aware of) so it felt like a true collaborative team effort in developing the concept and creating the animations. As a team, I always knew where things were at and you were really good at communicating with me and letting me know when you just needed some time to work on the project and when was useful to meet me in person. That really helped me to feel confident about the project throughout. I also really appreciated your openness to hearing my thoughts and ideas as we worked together to try to make sure the final animation honoured the script.

— Yours was one of the teams I had a really good sense of who was doing what (not entirely but mainly), which was great as it meant I could acknowledge individual people's work. As a comment to all teams, I would have really loved if the full team could have been present on the last day I was meeting you all, to make sure each person's input and work could be highlighted and acknowledged.

See image below of sample from the work of two projects
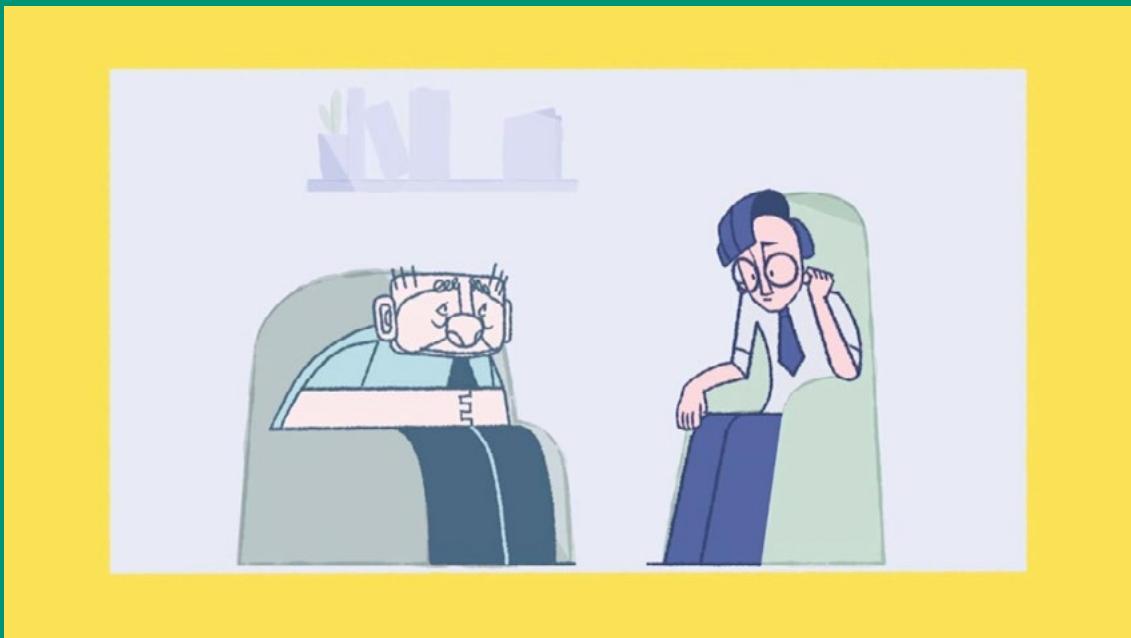
Figure 1. RCSI project – 2019 - ANXIETY
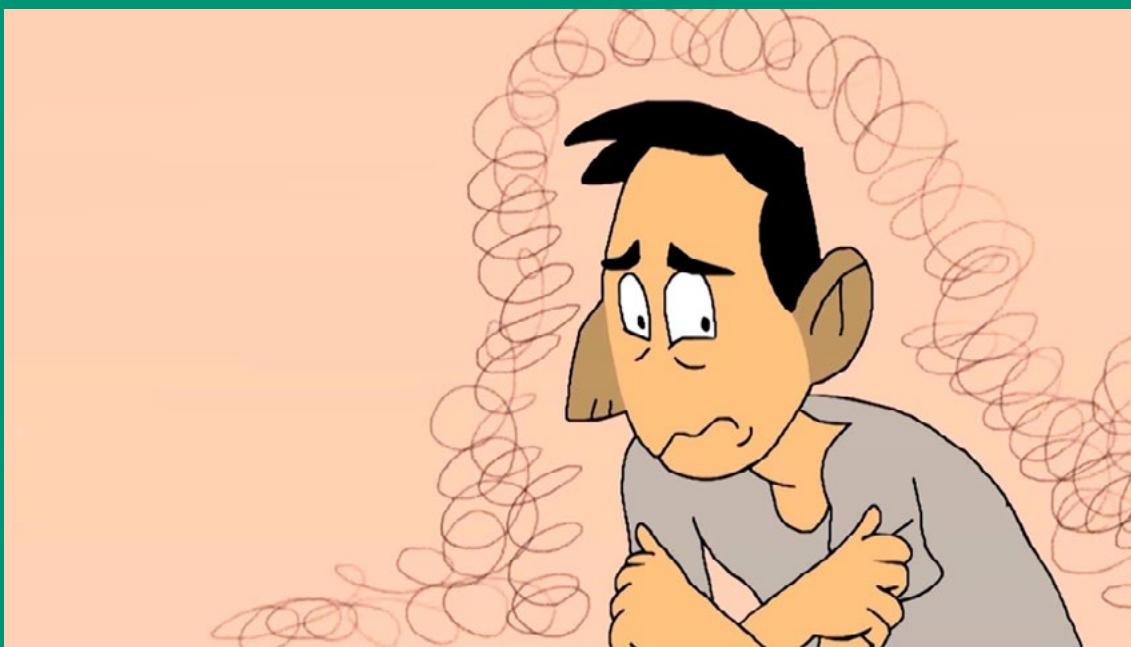
Figure 2. NRH project 2017 – FOCUS

How does all of this adhere to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles?

This assessment approach reflects some of the many suggestions that are outlined in the CAST UDL guidelines and have been applied to the Live Brief.

— **Variety** - A variety of assessment and feedback is provided (group feedback (especially written, through VLE Announcements and email), individual feedback, verbal weekly formative feedback (from programme team and client), presentation feedback and final summative and collated written feedback.

— **Transparency** – there is clear use of rubrics and lexicons and expectations are set early on.

— **Authentic** – these are clearly authentic forms of workplace assessment, but the educational and individual learning is being clearly forefronted.

— **Choice of assessment** – whilst students are 'encouraged' to self and peer assess, it is left to them to choose (without penalty). Many do, some do not. Students with Specific Learning Difficulties are also offered appropriate alternative modes of assessment, especially if they struggle with aspects of group or written work.

— **Scaffolding** - The entire process is scaffolded for the students. While they are learning to complete their group projects, deal with clients and stakeholders and present their work, they are also learning (in a more structured and professional manner) how to self and peer assess. Students can only formally learn this through doing.

In addition, throughout the entire process, students are encouraged to support each other through the assessment process, crediting themselves and their peers for their efforts.

Results

The problem of how to provide authentic 'industry' experience for our undergraduates and how to assess, feedback and enhance student learning through such placement requires continual engagement and innovative approaches. Our programme has no 'one size fits all' solution to this ongoing puzzle. We retain the flexibility to allow

our students to learn wherever the opportunity presents itself. We exercise careful judgement in selecting such opportunities, turning down many prospective industry and external 'partners'. Student learning is paramount in this relationship. As IADT's Dr. Marion Palmer would say 'industry are stakeholders in what we do but our students are our primary stakeholders'.

On impact, feedback from clients and other stakeholders tells us that our assessment models ae having positive impact. Feedback from students and from graduates tells us that our module has great benefits in terms of confidence building and in preparing our students, not only for the workplace, but for the opportunities presented by the world of media outside the college environment.

One completely unanticipated outcome has been that our students, through working with challenging subject material, get early insights into ethical aspects and the real need for sensitivity in dealing with such subjects. As a result, some of our students have been better positioned to subsequently deal with difficult subjects (for example sexual consent and alcoholism) in their own undergraduate Major Project work. Dealing with challenging subjects has allowed our students to challenge their own medium and their own working approaches.

One last observation – this is complex assessment, with feedback from multiple lecturers, from clients and from the students themselves (self-assess and peer-assess). A lot of work still needs to be done in order to streamline the assessment pipeline and to shorten the time taken to deliver feedback to our students.

Recommendations for Implementation

— Make sure that all members of your programme team are on board before initiating any 'live-brief' assessment initiatives.

— Do not aimlessly defer to industry! Stay focused on achieving the very best learning outcomes for your students! This is about the development of student process, not 'product' for industry!

— Start small and keep it simple! Consider internal projects first (for clients within your HEI) especially with 'worthwhile' partners who work with students - Student Welfare, Students Union, Writing, Research and Study Skills Unit, Counselling Services etc...

— Try to work with clients for two or three years, rather than for one year only – think long-term and strategically. Any project will grow and develop as your client learns (especially in relation to dealing with your students).

— Build assessment, feedback and Universal Design principles into the module design (instead of 'bolting them onto' a module design governed by creative conceptualisations).

References

CAST (2018) *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2*. Available at: http://udlguidelines.cast.org. (Accessed 15 March 2019)

Orr, S., Shreeve, A. (2017) *Art and Design Pedagogy in Higher Education: Knowledge, Values and Ambiguity in the Creative Curriculum*. Abington Oxon: Routledge

Pallof, R., Pratt, K. (2008) *Assessing the Online Learner – resources and strategies for Faculty*. Wiley.

Palmer, M (2017) *'Issues in Assessment and Evaluation' (Powerpoint)*, Certificate in Assessment in Evaluation, IADT, 16th May.

Appendix A

FACT Assessment Lexicon

Faculty of Film Art and Creative Technologies   **Assessment Lexicon**

QUALITY	Excellent		Good		Satisfactory			Un satisfactory	
AWARD	1st		2:1	2:2		3rd		(Condoned Fail)	FAIL
GPV	4	3.5	3	2.75	2.5	2			0
ALPHA	A	B+	B	B-	C+	C		D	F
%	80-100	70-79	B 60-69	55-59	50-54	40-49		35-39	0-34
	sophisticated	refined	thoughtful	tested	established	unadventurous	derivative	partial	incomplete
	rigorous	finesse	accomplished	thorough	complete	proficient	competent	clumsy	deficient
	incisive	flair	skilful	accurate	conventional	capable	superficial	unclear	unable
	scrupulous	dynamic	assured	grounded	clear	inconsistent	initiated	inappropriate	absent
	penetrating	lucid	dextrous	consistent	appropriate	straight-forward	threshold	misconstrued	erroneous
	insightful	distinctive	analysed	coordinated	coherent	hesitant	sufficient	unconsidered	wrong
	astute	inventive	critical	imaginative	reliable	outline	adequate	careless	mistaken
	innovative	comprehensive	decisive	independent	cautious	charted	unimaginative	curtailed	formless
	perceptive	expert	convincing	synthesised	resolved	tentative	inaccurate	faltering	unstructured
	challenging	perceptive	developed	effective	evidenced	provisional	unresolved	basic	shapeless
	definitive	cogent	fluent	complete	summary	uncertain	indistinct	undisciplined	
	authoritative	systematic	confident	logical	solid	indicative	imprecise	disorderly	
	commanding		robust	proficient	reliable	interim	inexact	vague	