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Providing Digital Resources to Enhance Graduate Attributes.

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4 Providing Digital Resources to Enhance Graduate Attributes

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Abstract

The objective of this Teaching Fellowship research project was to provide digital resources for students that could potentially enhance graduate attributes. This study was conducted during one semester and concentrated on one aspect of graduate attributes which was presentation skills. A video was scripted, shot and edited that demonstrated a rather inept presenter making a poor presentation. This video was then used in a Communications module specifically during the sessions that focussed on presentation skills. Background data on the participants' experience of formal presentations was gathered to provide a snapshot of their level of previous experience. The video was used to provoke discussion and engagement from the students. Following the lectures the students were canvassed for feedback. The video successfully provoked an awareness of the requirements in making a formal presentation and is now available as a digital resource. It is recommended that further research be carried out to determine the efficacy of utilising videos in the classroom to improve learning.

Keywords: *graduate attributes; presentation skills; social media; communications*

Introduction

In 2007, the DIT Academic Council approved a recommendation that “all programmes will provide students with a range of opportunities to develop, practice and be assessed on an agreed range of employability skills or graduate attribute” (DIT, 2007: 12). This project attempted to feed directly into such an undertaking through its student centred commitment and values placed on the development of graduate attributes and potential curriculum implementation Institute wide. The Higher Education Strategy Report (2011: 35) asked “what are the right skills for the graduates of 2015 and of 2030 and what mix of skills should we pursue as learning outcomes of higher education?” The report calls for increased attention to be paid to core skills such as team working skills and communication. It is the intention of this research to focus on these key graduate attributes and develop digital resources that can assist lecturers in higher education who deliver modules aimed at developing professional skills and graduate attributes.

DIT is committed to the enhancement of the student experience. This is evidenced through the DIT Strategic Plan 2016–2018 where it is explicitly stated that the DIT will provide “a distinctive, high quality, experiential student experience”. This research has the potential to provide just such an experience for the students while also placing DIT at the forefront of student care and development from a holistic point of view where the lifelong learning skills of the student are firmly grounded in real world activities.

I teach a module entitled “Communications” on a Level 7 Ordinary Degree programme. Within this module there is a strong emphasis on presentation skills reflected in the assessment. The module is weighted thus: 70% for written reports and 30% for a presentation. Traditionally I have noticed that a large percentage of students tend to avoid the presentation and will instead focus on the written reports. When asked afterwards as to why they adopted this strategy the answer usually revolves around fear of presenting or lack of confidence. It is hoped that utilising digital resources in the presentation lectures may also encourage students to participate fully in presentations.

Research Outline

The project had four distinct phases with deadlines in order to produce a video that could be used in the second semester of the academic year when the Communications module was delivered.

Phase 1

Initially this phase was to occur during semester 1 and produce two videos focussing on presentation skills. One video would demonstrate a poorly prepared presenter and a poorly prepared presentation. The second video would show a competent presenter and a well thought out presentation. The first video was scripted, shot and edited and made ready for use. Unfortunately due to time constraints the second video was not made although the script and production plan were done. It is expected that this video will be produced at some stage in the near future.

Phase 2

Students were given out a pre-lecture questionnaire (see Appendix 4.1). The sheets were given out and collected a week before the planned lecture on presentation skills. This was done in an attempt to gather some background information regarding their experience of making presentations. There were 18 students in the group (n=18) with 16 being school leavers and two being non-standard entrants where non-standard entrants are classified as anyone over 23 years old.

Phase 3

During this phase the video was used in class. The video was integrated into a lecture concentrating on what constituted a good presentation and what good presentation skills looked like. To begin the students were split into groups of three and given out a worksheet (see Appendix 4.2). The worksheet asked the students to list the elements that went into making an excellent presentation. There were ten spaces for responses and students could turn the page over and continue the list overleaf.

Phase 4

This phase occurred two weeks after the lectures and involved gathering feedback from the students. Please see Appendix 4.3 for feedback sheet.

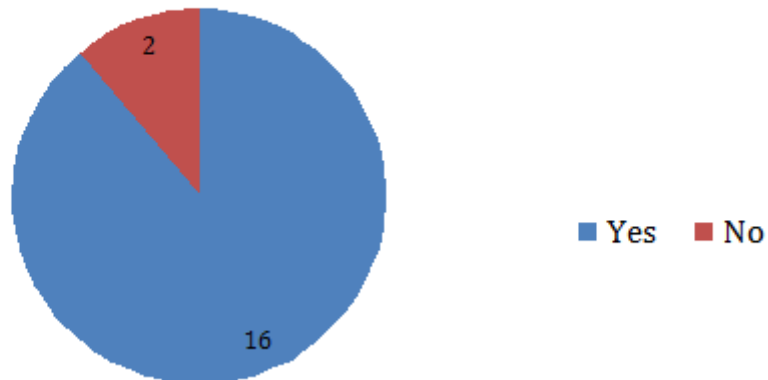
Results and Discussion

To begin, the pre-lecture questionnaire will be analysed and discussed. This will be followed by the Presentation Worksheet and finally the Video Feedback Sheet. On the two days that this research was carried out there was full attendance, so in all cases the participants were 18 (n=18).

Pre-Lecture Questionnaire

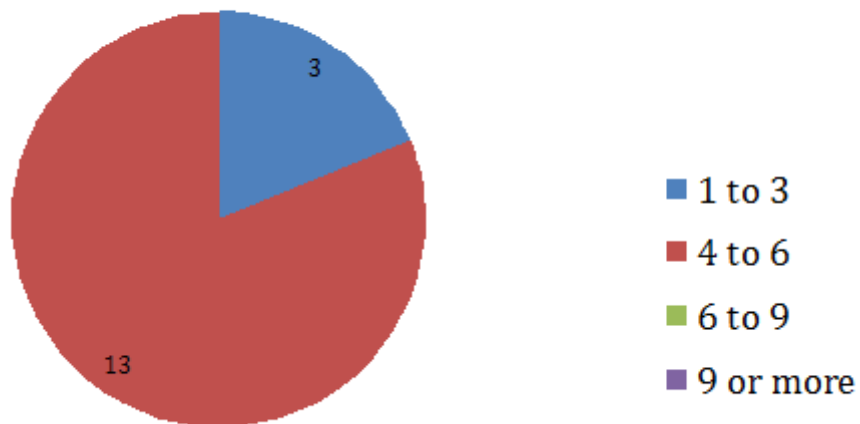
The pre-lecture questionnaires were utilised to gather background data on participants. Question 1 asked if they had ever done a formal presentation previously. The results can be seen in Figure 4.1 and showed that 16 out of 18 students had done a formal presentation previously.

Figure 4.1: Have you ever done a formal presentation?



Question 2 asked how many formal presentations the students had done. It can be seen from Figure 4.2 that nobody had presented more than six times and the majority of the group (n=13) had done between four and six presentations. Following the collation of the results the students were asked in what context their presentations had taken place and the answers indicated it was part of their Leaving Certificate studies.

Figure 4.2: If yes, then how many?



Question 3 asked if the student enjoyed doing formal presentations. Figure 4.3 shows the overwhelming answer was no with two students indicating they didn't know. It is safe to assume these two students are those who previously answered they had never done a formal presentation and thus did not know if they enjoyed them or not.

Figure 4.3: Do you enjoy doing formal presentations?



The last two questions on the questionnaire attempted to gather qualitative data. Data collection that is qualitative in nature includes in-depth interviews, usually involves words and/or images and open ended questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This research used two open ended questions.

Question 4 asked “What is the most appealing aspect of doing a formal presentation?” The majority of the responses were clear and can be summarised as there being nothing appealing about doing a presentation. One divergent answer indicated “it’s a change from the usual stuff”. This in itself does not show any particular appealing aspect of presentations but rather only that they are a break from the normal routine.

Question 5 asked “What is the least appealing aspect of doing a presentation?” There were many diverse responses here. One of the more common responses can be summarised as the fear of looking foolish. This fear is surprising given the majority of the class are school leavers aged between 18 and 19 years old and seemed quite comfortable with each other having spent a full semester in the same class. Coupled with their age is also the fact that most of them have already done at least one formal presentation.

Presentation Worksheet

The class began with students being put into groups of three. Names were randomly selected and there were six groups. Each group was given a copy of the presentation worksheet and asked to produce a list detailing what elements go into making an excellent presentation in order of importance. Anything they thought of any value was to be included. The sheets were collected after 15 minutes and the class then began. When the class was finished the worksheets were analysed and the feedback was summarised into themes. Three strong themes emerged: the first was to speak loudly; the second was to try being funny; and the third was to ensure that no swear words were used. From follow on discussions it became apparent that some of the participants had attended weddings and were thinking in terms of wedding speeches. Other had taken part in team sports and were members of winning teams and were thinking of acceptance speeches.

Once the worksheets were collected the video was then played through a multimedia projector onto a large screen. The finished video was four minutes in duration and shot from the perspective of a person sitting in a tiered classroom. A man walks into the classroom and sets up to make a presentation from a podium in the corner. There are delays as he tries to cope with the computer and he makes many impatient noises as he struggles to get the computer up and running. Eventually the screen comes on and he can begin his presentation. It becomes apparent that he is introducing the class to a module he will be teaching to them. The non-verbal communications of the lecturer are poor as he repeatedly looks out of the window, at the floor, and does not make good eye contact with the students. He is generally fidgeting in an obviously overly nervous manner. His clothes are also inappropriate for the setting as is wearing sports style or leisure wear more appropriate for a visit to the gym than a classroom. The presentation itself is poor and it becomes obvious that the presenter did not prepare the slides as he is unaware of what is coming up on the slides. He continually reads the slides rather than actually presenting his subject matter.

Once the video was completed the presentation worksheet was once again handed out to the same groups and they were asked to complete them again. There was very little time and the groups did not have time to interact with each other. This time the responses were fairly consistent across the groups. The themes that emerged were many and included the following main themes: dress appropriately; be confident; speak clearly and loudly; prepare your own slides; practice your presentation, check the technology beforehand. The responses were more varied the second time around and were relatable to making a presentation rather than a speech.

Evaluation

Based upon the responses from the Presentation Worksheet the use of the video prompted a more interactive and thoughtful response from the students. Having seen the video, which emphasised the effects of both poor preparation and a poor presentation, the students were in a position to identify best practice for making presentations. However, it has been my experience that students always like seeing videos in the classroom and videos can in fact become distracting rather than helpful. Two weeks after the video was used in the classroom the video feedback sheets were given out to ascertain the usefulness of the videos (see Appendix 4.3). During this session there were only 16 out of 18 participants present (n=16). The sheets were handed out and the students were given time to fill them out. The lecturer left the room during this time and all the sheets were collected by the class representative and placed on the podium in the room. No identifying marks were made on the sheets. The participants were asked to be honest in their responses.

Statement 1

Statement 1	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Videos are useful in a lecture.	5	4	3	2	1
	75%	25%			

Table 4.1: Statement 1 Results

There was complete support for this statement with 12 responses indicating “Strongly Agree” and four indicating “Agree”. There was a comment box in the questionnaire and students were encouraged to provide comments if they had any. Some of the remarks were “you should encourage more lecturers to dos tuff like this” and “two hours is too long to sit here writing and listening, a video breaks the monotony of a lecture”.

Statement 2

Statement 2	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Videos can help my understanding of a topic.	5	4	3	2	1
	62.5%	25%	6.25%	6.25%	

Table 4.2: Statement 2 Results

A more varied response was elicited through statement 2. There was a majority agreeing with this with 10 indicating “Strongly Agree” and four indicating “Agree”. Comments from those who strongly agreed included, “I learn better when I see it” and “a picture tells a thousand words”. There was one response which indicated “Don't know” commenting “I have no way of telling if the video helped without a test”. Finally one participant marked “Disagree” and wrote “I much prefer to read and learn than view and take it all in. There is less pressure when you are writing.”

Statement 3

Statement 3	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Don't Know 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1
This video helped me develop my presentations skills.		68.75%	25%	6.25%	

Table 4.3: Statement 3 Results

Statement 3 was essentially asking the students to reflect on their learning and indicate whether they thought the video had helped. The consensus was that it had helped with 11 indicating “Agree”. Comments here included “I always knew about wearing proper clothes but seeing the fella in the video wearing such wrong clothes really made the point strongly” and “Seeing the presenter making all those the mistakes was clever – it was so obvious what was wrong! I think that will make it easier to remember how to do it right”. There were four who responded “Don’t Know” and some of the comments included “It certainly made me think about making a presentation but I don’t know if it will actually help me make a better presentation. I suppose I know what not to do now” and “Not sure here, maybe when we do the presentations I could tell you better”. Finally there was one participant who indicated “Disagree” and he commented “It is practice that makes perfect, not looking at someone else doing it.” It is interesting here that none of the respondents indicated strong agreement that the video helped develop their presentation skills.

Conclusions

This research set out to provide digital resources in the form of videos for students in an attempt to enhance their graduate attributes. A home-made video was scripted and produced and is now available as a digital resource. Determining the efficacy of the videos in terms of graduate attributes is unclear. It is without doubt that the majority of students liked seeing videos used in the classroom and also that the majority agreed that the videos helped develop their presentations skills. However, at the time of writing the assessment has not occurred and there is no control group to compare the results from this group with. Future research may possibly look at assessing a group first as a comparator and then utilising this video, and perhaps the video that was planned but not made, and an attempt to determine if the use of videos has any real impact.

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Appendix 4.1

Pre-lecture questionnaire

Q1: Have you ever done a formal presentation? Yes/No (Please circle as appropriate)

Q2: If yes, then how many? 1–3/4–6/6–9/9+ (Please circle as appropriate)

Q3: Do you enjoy doing formal presentations? Yes/No/ Don't know. (Please circle as appropriate)

Q.4: What is the most appealing aspect of doing a presentation?

Q5: What is the least appealing aspect of doing a presentation?

Appendix 4.2

Presentation Worksheet

Group: _____

You have been asked to produce a list detailing what elements go into making an excellent presentation. Please list your responses below in order of importance with Number 1 being the most important and so on.

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

Appendix 4.3

Video Feedback Sheet

This sheet is designed to measure your attitude towards the use of videos in the classroom. Place a mark in the box you think corresponds to your response to the statement. Example, if you select 5 it means you Strongly Agree with the statement, if you select the number 3 it means you neither agree nor disagree and if you select number 1 you strongly disagree with the statement.

Statement 1	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Don't Know 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1
Videos are useful in a lecture.					
<i>Comment</i>					
Statement 2	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Don't Know 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1
Videos can help my understanding of a topic.					
<i>Comment</i>					
Statement 3	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Don't Know 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1
This video helped me develop my presentations skills.					
<i>Comment</i>					