Vlogging in student-led seminars

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Assessment for Learning at King's

Description

Module: Health and Development in Emerging Economies.

Students work in groups of four to produce an 8-minute video blog (vlog) for 40% of the module assessment. The vlog should introduce and outline a conceptual argument about a contemporary health issue in emerging economy countries. The vlog is then shown and presented by the students in class as a launch-point for them to lead a 30-minute discussion, broken down into specific activities that they plan and coordinate. Each group provides a copy of their vlog to me and produces a one-page report that outlines their intended learning outcomes for the other students, the activities to achieve those outcomes, and a reflection on how the session went.

Motivation and Aims

I was interested in introducing a method of assessment that would incorporate visual materials and encourage creativity. This can be difficult to achieve with typical essay/exam methods of assessment. I was also aware of a rise in vlogging, by Youtubers, but also by development organisations, commentators and journalists. Vlogs allow you to incorporate a range of materials into one video, potentially bringing together video and audio clips and pictures. You can incorporate short interviews and correspondent-style segments, or apply a voiceover to visual materials gathered online. There are various software packages that allow you to stitch all of these together and to add text as necessary. The use of vlogs as a method of assessment seemed a potentially valuable way to build on the students' critical writing skills by asking them to apply their arguments to 'real-world' issues, supported by visual materials.

The decision to introduce the assessment was made at the module level after consulting the programme leader to ensure it would complement other forms of learning and assessment on the programme. The combination of communicating a conceptual argument to an audience, and then leading discussion and debate on the topic fits with all of the learning outcomes for the module.

Methodology

How did you design the assessment criteria and weighting?

Initially the assessment contributed 10% towards the final mark for the module. Our departmental marking criteria already included a section specifically for oral presentations, encompassing seven key aspects for evaluation:

- focus on the question within the set amount of time;
- critical understanding and evaluation;
- argument or discussion in context of literature;
- independent thought or analysis in argument;
- structure and flow of argument or analysis;
- appropriate citation of readings and,
- effective communication.

I adapted this set of marking criteria to reflect the slightly different style of presentation (vlog and leading discussion, as opposed to simply an oral presentation). This entailed merging criteria on understanding

and argument, and on focus and structure, and adding criteria for 'design and visual quality of the vlog' and for 'planning and management of activities to stimulate discussion'.

Student evaluation feedback after the first year using this assessment indicated that students enjoyed producing the vlogs but felt the amount of work required was not adequately reflected in the 10% allocation of module marks. Following this feedback I increased the mark allocation from 10% to 40%, removing a summative essay to accommodate this change. (The remaining 60% is an examination). The change now means that second marking and external examination are required for the assessment.

To accommodate this I have added a requirement for each group to complete a short one-page outline of the session which sets out the intended learning outcomes, planned activities, and some reflections on how the session went. All sessions will be double marked by a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) and myself, and vlogs and session outlines will be submitted to the external examiner.

How did you explain this to students?

The assessment is explained to students in the first week of term but groups are allocated in the second week of term (to allow for 'shopping around' of modules during week one). The assessment is explained as a method of learning about health topics in a creative and engaging way. I emphasise that the assessment builds upon many skills they already possess from two years of undergraduate study where they have frequently developed written arguments and participated in GTA-led seminars.

An example vlog is shown in this first class, and we discuss what worked well in the vlog, what did not, and other potential pitfalls. I emphasise that visual quality is far less important than a well-developed argument that shows originality and creativity.

How did you give feedback and provide formative practice?

At the end of class each week I sit down with the group who will be leading the following week's session and we talk through their plans for the session, including a timeline for producing the vlog. This provides a valuable opportunity to discuss technical issues and any flaws in their argument, much like discussing an essay plan. During the concluding session of the term, I reiterate the purpose of the student-led sessions as developing communication and management skills that are highly valued by employers.

During the session I make detailed notes using a standardised form broken down by the seven aspects of evaluation. The form template was made available on the King's College London Virtual learning environment – KEATS − so students could see the criteria for their assessment.

At the end of each student-led session we encourage some brief reflection amongst the cohort, where other students are encouraged to say what they enjoyed and where the student organisers explain what they found difficult and what they might have done differently. I provide my own comments and suggestions where necessary during these reflections.

After the final student-led session I decide marks for each of the groups and provide detailed written feedback to each group with suggestions for improvement on the different aspects of evaluation.

Successes | Challenges | Lessons Learned

What benefits did you see?

This form of assessment really encourages students to think in detail about how to plan and present ideas and arguments. They enjoy the opportunity to be creative in their studies and I see them engaging with topics in ways that the typical reading-lecture-discussion model doesn't quite achieve. I have learnt a lot myself from their use of topical events and issues to illustrate arguments.

The student-led sessions take place over a series of weeks, each incorporating a concept introduced in the previous week. This not only provides a way of reinforcing learning about a topic by discussing on two consecutive weeks, but also provides me with an opportunity to gauge how the students have understood a topic and areas that require further attention.

One student commented how they had never previously realised how much thinking and planning goes into seminars, nor did they realise how much effort was required to get students to engage in discussion. They noted that they were now much more sympathetic to GTAs! The vlog and discussion activities were a common theme in the student module evaluation, with several students mentioning 'vlog' in the 'briefly summarise the strengths of this module', and one noting: 'I liked the idea of having a lecture on broad theory, and then focus in on a particular example during the discussion/vlogs'.

I personally noticed a sense of camaraderie that developed in the classroom as they took it in turns to support each other by actively participating in discussions. A senior colleague who contributed to the module also remarked that they thought the vlogs were innovative and effective.

What challenges did you encounter and how did you address them?

Workload: Initially the workload increased as I spent a couple of days producing my own vlog to use as an example. While much of the feedback takes place in class, some additional time will be necessary to meet with the other marker and agree marks and provide detailed written feedback. However, developing my own vlog was a one-off commitment, and was in any case a useful exercise for my own research which informed the vlog. Further by increasing the mark allocation 40% this year I have removed a summative essay, therefore freeing up time for the marking workload associated with this vlog assessment.

Use of technology: In the past I had difficulty identifying a way for students to submit vlogs via KEATS as the submission system could not handle the large file size. Instead I took a copy from each group via a USB stick. This year I am looking into the potential for using Kaltura as a submission system for the vlogs. So far I have opted not to make the vlogs a publicly available resource (e.g. on YouTube) as I feel this would add an extra level of stress for the students, and creates potential for copyright challenges if other organisations' pictures/videos are used in vlogs.

Procedure: Increasing the assessment from 10% to 40% meant applying to amend module assessment patterns to remove a summative essay and to increase weighting for the vlog. However, this means the assessment now requires a second marker and consideration by the programme's external examiner.

Cohort size: The first trial year I had 16 students on the module and so four groups presented their vlog over four weeks in the middle of term. This year I have 32 students, which would be difficult to fit into a 10-week term while allowing a few weeks for preparation. However as an undergraduate module with more than 30 students I qualified for teaching support in the form of a GTA who will lead two seminars each week. I have therefore adjusted the module structure so that the vlogs and discussion will take place during the seminars this year, rather than in the lectures.

Inclusivity: The use of vlogs presents a potential challenge for people with hearing disabilities and I have started to encourage students to include subtitles in their vlogs, or a transcript. While many students are very adept at using phones/tablets/laptops to record videos, some struggle with the

production elements of the assessment, and this came up in module feedback. This year I am planning to try to purposefully allocate groups to ensure a spread of confidence with using technology in each group.

Scalability and Transferability

What advice would you give to colleagues who are thinking of trying vlogging?

The students I worked with have been very capable at putting together vlogs and planning sessions, but this is a novel activity and assessment and so I have faced a lot of questions and needed to provide a lot of support. I think it is important to consider how much support you can realistically provide, both in terms of time and technical expertise.

Finally, if you intend to use student vlogs from previous cohorts as exemplars, please ensure that you obtain consent from students to do this.

Further Information

This case study was sourced from- Assessment for Learning at King's, King's College London. Available at: **https://blogs.kcl.ac.uk/aflkings/2018/11/12/vlogging-in-student-led-seminars/** [Accessed 30 Jan. 2020].