Developing Talent & Intellectual Property for Digital Entertainment: Space to 'Play'?

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Abstract

This paper considers the notion of 'play' in education; as an integral part of developing talent and concepts for the digital entertainment industries; as a tool for designing and evaluating participants' experience of an educational trajectory; and as an approach towards developing innovative Continuing Professional Development (CPD) initiatives. The authors examine two case studies, one at Post Graduate level within Higher Education and a CPD initiative operating independently. The selection process, teaching methods, learning outcomes, assessment and feedback instruments are considered in each case. Overall, the paper argues for clearer communication of the benefits and limitations of any particular course and the degree to which apparently immutable practices within Higher Education can mitigate against the conditions conducive to experimentation and play.

Introduction

This study was set up to inform a high standard of professional practice in the management and delivery of post graduate and continuing professional development (CPD) training in the field of talent and intellectual property development for digital entertainment. It aims to highlight issues that Higher Education might consider in better positioning itself towards offering students, as adult learners and customers, better-informed choices. The issues that emerge are pertinent to contemporary debates within the creative industries, and more widely, about the development of 'employability skills.'

The Leitch Review (2006) examined the UK's long-term skills needs and identified an optimal skills mix in order to 'maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice'. The UK wide review marked a shift towards a more 'demand-led' approach to skills development and argued that the responsibility for achieving these ambitions must be shared between government, employers and individuals alike. A consideration of the role of the Universities in this context is therefore interesting, and perhaps timely. On 13th January 2009, a letter sent from Education Secretary Fiona Hyslop to chairman of the Scottish Funding Council John McClelland, highlights the economic challenges facing Scotland in particular." Ms Hyslop wrote, under the heading "Employability and skills interventions"

"Our key ambitions will be to better develop entrepreneurial capacity and graduate employability, to work actively with employers to ensure skills learned during courses at college or university can be utilised to best effect in the workplace"¹.

This was received with opposition from within Higher Education and some antipathy towards the notion that government should dictate what skills H.E. should inculcate. This debate is not going to go away particularly in regards to the Creative Industries which have demonstrated significant growth in an otherwise turbulent economy. But whatever position we might take, we need to ensure that whatever is marketed at students, as consumers, allows them to make informed choices as to exactly what any particular educational or professional development experience will provide them with - whether that be industry led or not. This is overall an opportunity to consider the degree to which the current offerings ever *could* be fit for industry purpose, whatever our feelings might be as to how far they actually *should*.

The Case Studies

The researchers analysed the selection process, teaching, learning, assessment and feedback instruments of two extant 'professional' training initiatives, *The Animation Finishing School* – an independently run, CPD initiative and *Writing for Interactive Entertainment* a Post Graduate module within the MA Screenwriting Programme at Screen Academy, Scotland. Structurally the Screen Academy was set up as one of seven Screen Academies across the UK in response to the same economic and political impetus as the Leitch review. *The Animation Finishing School* was set up by practitioners in response to the standard and level of 'Professional Practice' training currently on offer in Scotland. These particular examples were chosen because they both dealt with the creation of intellectual properties for digital entertainment and the development of talent. Useful comparisons could then be made between a module taught within Higher Education and one operating independently.

The *Animation Finishing School* (AFS) was set up to develop professional talent and intellectual properties for Film, TV and Interactive Entertainment where there is an over-riding emphasis upon animation as the primary means of visual storytelling. The co-founders, all industry practitioners, felt there was a need for a 'space' within which writers and animators who had already demonstrated a passion and aptitude for their respective crafts could develop their knowledge skills and understanding out-with the established infrastructures of training at 1. Post Graduate level – which is difficult and costly to undertake when operating as an industry freelancer – and 2. within production companies (industry) - which typically comes with its own constraints, namely the desire of the company to own all intellectual property rights. These restrictions suggested that there was a pressing need for this space to be 'opened up'.

The founders of AFS had the following shared values that formed its philosophy and ethos.

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- Tried and tested storytelling strategies should form the basis of play and innovation
- High quality outcomes are possible if development time were properly afforded, iterations frequent and feedback immediate.
- Concepts should be rigorously tested through play and experimentation.
- All properties should be of broadcast quality and/or festival entry standard.
- Participants should develop their skills and understanding within a network of internationally recognised professionals.
- Opportunities should be created for professionals to work directly with internationally recognised professionals in order to inculcate a greater sense of working within an international context from Scotland.
- An indigenous industry will be improved by facilitating collaborations between writers and animators earlier than is usual in the development process and developing an entrepreneurial spirit between them

In order to achieve these aims the proprietors adopted a methodology to the development of the scheme and called it the 'lego brick approach' whose metaphor recognized quite playfully how they might achieve their aims in an incremental and non-linear fashion. This meant that they could make the most of opportunities as and when they presented themselves and the model could be constructed in any number of permutations, to any scale and can form and reform as appropriate to the prevailing circumstances. This was necessary given the structural issues they were up against. In order to allow play to happen, they needed to address as far as possible and have means of dealing with the constraints that could have prevented it happening, particularly in the commercial environment, chiefly time, money and resources.

Operating outside of the public sector and its extant training and development infrastructures meant that the proprietors had to finance their initiatives privately. But rather than digging into their own pockets and, suggesting that this was in any way restrictive, by taking the initiative into the market place they were able to free themselves from structures and influences that may have taken them and their clients down a very different and arguably more orthodox development path. This approach resulted in a range of activities and outcomes that may not necessarily be repeated year on year, but has already delivered on the proprietors' aims and objectives.

In the creative arts there is strong reason for arguing to push out the boundaries and enlarge the scope for greater creative freedom and opportunity. John Lasseter in a recent interview for Ramaswamy (2009), is unapologetic when he tells that during his recent reorganization of the Disney studio he was accused of being, 'ruthlessly creative' by one of his outgoing executives. In regard to his new role as chief creative officer of Disney/Pixar he states, 'But one thing we did bring from Pixar, which we knew worked, was making it film-maker led. I put film-makers back in charge.' Moreover, Lasseter attributes that this approach 'ensured the film *Bolt* was made in 18 months instead of the customary four years.' 'The creativity was crushed,' he says of what Disney looked like when he arrived. 'The filmmakers had lost their compass. So the movies came out and it was the same amount of people, the same amount of hard work, the same cost, and they were mediocre.'

Animation Finishing School found that its ethos resonated with students, mentors, companies and collaborators alike.

The aim was to allow different stakeholders with a common interest in animation to find ways of 'playing' to their mutual benefit. Entering into a dialogue with a number of animation, games production studios and public bodies allowed them to better understand and communicate what they had to offer. The process of engaging each of these interest groups also allowed them to refine and define their aims and exactly what it was that they could usefully offer to each party further down the line. Defining AFS as 'research and development for writing and animation', for instance, allowed the proprietors to position the project as 'bridging the gap' between Higher Education and professional practice. Labeling AFS as a 'space to play' was a useful metaphor in describing its character and function as this was a notion readily understood and acknowledged as appropriate and valuable to the companies they engaged with.

Many indigenous studios do not have the power and resources afforded by the scale of Disney/Pixar and the proprietors found that the studios welcomed the opportunity to see intellectual property being developed free(r) of commercial pressures. Whilst this was exactly what was conjectured starting out, AFS made it their *raison d'être* that play remained housed within the *objectives* of a commercial enterprise - to develop properties that 'reached, touched and entertained' audiences through bold storytelling strategies. 'Play' then, took place within carefully designed parameters to ensure that the creative outputs remained focused and professional.

In order to establish a productive and mutually beneficial relationship with commercial studios, AFS also found it necessary to mark out clearly the territory in which their workshops would operate. This was in order to reassure the studios that it didn't represent a commercial threat but rather an opportunity to enhance their own capabilities and capacities. Setting out clearly what AFS was and was not about was a key part of the process:

- The clearest statement the proprietors had to make was that AFS was *not* a production house.
- AFS would develop intellectual properties that were wholly owned by the practitioners and/or companies from whom the intellectual property originated.
- AFS would add value to prospective artistic properties by fuller collaboration and deeper development at the early inception of ideas and concept development.
- Collaborations would afford opportunities for high-level professional development that was otherwise missing from the landscape.
- Any apparent altruism was balanced by the proprietor's own intellectual properties being treated as part of the development process within AFS framework.

The first AFS 'lego brick' was *Creating and Defining Memorable Characters*, a workshop which grew out of the early realisation that it would be beneficial to bring writers and animators together. This was borne out of the proprietor's own industry experience where, very often, these two spheres of professional practice, each with their own distinct processes, operated in isolation to each other, particularly at the early stages of development. But each discipline also shared a common practice: performance, acting-out and *play*. The proprietors asked 'what if we brought both crafts together earlier than would be expected within industry and encouraged the role-play and performance aspect of the process, thereby augmenting that process and outputs for both parties?

In order to maximise the opportunity for all they needed to bring in high-level international mentors. Seeking mentors to participate in the workshop afforded the opportunity to develop meaningful working relationships with a number of high profile international practitioners and achieve the highest level of international 'knowledge transfer'. Yvette Kaplan was the workshop's first speaker and had worked in the development of a number of animation projects for film and TV, both in the United States and in Europe. She had a wealth of experience that directly related to the development of animations from concept to completion. Amongst other screen credits she was the animation director for *Beavis and Butthead Do America* and was the head of story for *Ice Age* the movie. Kaplan was attracted by the core ethos of the AFS and of the idea of developing a closer relationship between animators and writers earlier in the process than was the norm. The first *Creating and Defining Memorable Characters* workshop began as a two-day workshop event in November 2007 and was run again in November 2008. Kaplan flew from Los Angeles to Dundee, Scotland in order to support both programmes.

The taught post-graduate module *Writing for Interactive Entertainment* sat within its parent Programme, MA Screenwriting, which in turn sat beside its sister, a taught Masters Programme, *Screen Project Development* within Screen Academy, Scotland. The Screen Academy is part of a Network of institutions identified by the UK Film Industry as centres of excellence in film education and training. There was no apparent ethos behind the creation of the module over and above the then Programme Leader's desire to see Screenwriters and Producers equipped with skills that reflected changes in industry and the labour market.

i) The Selection Process

Successful games and interactive entertainment usually begin by 'calling the player to action' and, to do that, assume a specific level of knowledge, understanding and skills that the player will bring to the experience. That same skill set can then easily be built upon in order to allow the *player* (or participant) to enter 'the world' of the game and forge relationships with its characters, environments, authority structures, feedback, value and reward systems in order to complete the overall objectives successfully - and to *enjoy* the overall process simultaneously. The parallels with education are clear: The choice to take a course at post-graduate or CPD level is a life choice and similarly, a 'call to action'. And whilst the user of the experience, the student, the consumer may or may not know exactly what their objective might be *after* the experience - they might want to be employed as a screenwriter or animator within the digital media sector for example - they need to know that the learning experience that they are about to embark on is exactly fit for purpose and understand how far it will take them on that trajectory towards their overall objective.

The process by which participants were selected was different in each of the case studies and determined the profile of each cohort directly, as we might expect. But the extent to which the manner of this 'call to action' determined attitudes and predisposed students towards what they were about to learn was striking. There is therefore a need for a careful distinction and clarity to be made between the process whereby clients select a course and proprietors of a course select its participants.

Students of the Post Graduate taught master's module were selected through the Screen Academy's interview procedures where selection was based uniformly upon the submission of the University's standard application form, an interview, the

submission of portfolio products - short scripts - and proof of the ability to pay. The pre-requisites for the module per se were simply that all students in question had to have completed modules running in Autumn 2007, *Writing and Screen Project Development* and *Script Development Workshop 1*. All students had therefore completed at least one short (ten minute) film screenplay and written a story and a script report. It was assumed, then, that most students would have little or no experience of writing for interactive entertainment - although it was assumed that students' consumption of, and exposure to 'new' media would vary considerably. Student feedback was exclamatory! They simply did not understand *why* they were being told to take an interactive module on a Film course. Even though the reason why they were taking the module became only too evident to them during the course, they entered the module without knowing exactly *why* they were taking it. This had a negative impact upon their levels of morale and trust in the organisation - an institutional culture within which creative 'play' was consequently more difficult to engender as part of the learning process. Knowles (1998) points out that adult learners 'need to know why they need to know something before they are willing to invest time and energy learning it'.

This point was supported by the study in that students in this above case spoke of feeling 'de-motivated'. But they also reported, surprisingly that 'it was not their place to say whether a particular course was relevant or not'. Students stated their feeling in the expectations and feedback questionnaires but felt they were not in any position to affect any change. From the students' point of view they simply had to do the module whether they liked it or not, for credit. They had to pick up and collect valuable credit points as they passed through this particular level and played this particular 'game'.

What appears to be critical at this stage was not just the extent to which the selection process identified whether prospective students possessed the appropriate *attributes* but how it predisposed them towards the particular experience they were about to embark upon. Attributes are one thing but any one individual's *attitude* towards the attributes they possess is yet another and perhaps something that is less tangible and therefore over-looked in the processing of large student numbers. The initial shock of finding out exactly what new skills students would have to acquire in order to get them through the Masters had a direct and negative impact upon the students' motivation to proceed.

Participants of *Creating and Defining Memorable Characters* were selected on the basis of demonstrable two-year's professional experience, as writers, animators or creative producers, proof of which experience afforded them some support for their fees. The recruitment process was selective in this way in order to ensure that the participants themselves could share and benefit from their respective experiences and the relationship between mentors and participants remained as much of a peer-to-peer nature as possible. Although, this need for mutual respect was considered to be an important precondition for the environment that the proprietors wanted to create, there still had to be some degree of disparity of experience or skills between the mentors and paying participants to ensure they all 'went away with something new.' This balancing act was achieved owing exactly to the international calibre, culture and professional *attitude* of the speaker.

AFS participants began the course knowing exactly what it was they wanted from the course content, the industry that

they wanted to develop skills for, the mentors teaching the course and of *themselves*. There was then a more direct relationship between the skills participants were bringing in and the content of the course itself. This appears to have created an atmosphere within which critical discussion, creativity and innovation was lively and robust between participants, participants and mentors and mentors alike. The difference in the levels of motivation and focus was pronounced as evidenced not only by the quality of the work they produced at all stages throughout but also the levels of their collaboration and critical engagement.

All participants who selected the *AFS* workshop did so because they had at their core, and its' title, the objective *to create and define memorable characters*. That was the objective participants had identified with and the skill set they wanted to learn more about. The overall objective was embodied within the title of the taught masters module too but students at the Screen Academy module were given that information only *after* they have obeyed the call to action, invested their resources and entered the world, its environments, characters, authority structures, feedback, value and reward systems. The benefits to *AFS* participants were more explicit; directly working with top-flight talent was clearly attractive to them with the added opportunity to develop new intellectual property under professional guidance.

Both courses selected their participants on the basis of the ability to pay. But the culture in which the post-graduate students found themselves was quite different from that of paying participants of the *AFS*. This was a culture in which the student was told what to do 'because it was good for them' rather than a culture in which an ethos of *choice* was apparent and self guided learning an option. Some argue that such a pedagogic approach is indeed required at Higher Education and there *has* to be some element of students being 'guided' into new areas for their own benefit. This is a dangerous assumption: In this case study, not only did all sets of participants pay for their learning, the average age of the cohort taking the Masters Programme was significantly higher than that taking the CPD initiative. Both cohorts were made up of *paying adults* and as such each individual was entitled equally to relate to the delivering body and be treated as adult learners as an essential part of the learning process. And without that level of *ownership* of learning there was unlikely to be the appropriate level of engagement, immersion, motivation, satisfaction, success or *enjoyment*.

This top down and authoritarian culture is perhaps anachronistic and inappropriate in times when education is a choice that one pays for. This suggests the need to consider 'options' within Masters trajectories within this sector particularly when the demand from industry is for specialist rather than generalised skills. And students are increasingly aware of their right to be taught what they have paid to be taught.

The selection process then remains a critical mechanism in aligning the key elements of the learning experience to the participants' skills closely. It is here that the outcomes of the course can be communicated most clearly and the *shared* nature of these objectives can be impressed upon. As in most good interactive entertainment, clear and well-communicated goals are essential to the management of participants' expectations as in high quality education, at any level. And the selection process is one of the key stages at which the institution and the individual can communicate, align these objectives properly, and adopt the appropriate role in the participants' call to adventure and *play*.

ii) Learning Outcomes

Most successful games have an over-riding objective to keep the player focused throughout each level and challenge; to defeat the evil emperor Zorg, for instance, to rescue Princess Peach from Bowser or to find Molly's parents in the frozen Artic North. Ok, we are not asking our students to be heroes. Or are we? They should certainly be playing a role toward an objective. And that role should motivate every thing they *do* or are *active* in doing towards reaching that final objective, which in both case studies was to write and present a 'professional' digital entertainment proposal.

In the case of the taught masters module, learning outcomes were communicated to students via the module descriptor which stated that students would: 1. Plan, write and present a proposal 'at professional level 2. Identify current interactive media design processes and practices 3. Demonstrate appropriate project management, research skills and advanced knowledge of key roles within the digital media industry and 4. Critically evaluate digital media projects. From this and the module handout students could learn about the general nature of the course, the skills, attributes and objectives that students were expected to acquire by the end of the module and how this would be demonstrated and measured by the module's assessment scheme. The learning outcomes and objectives were communicated to students in this case and bound by the internal logic and rules of the institution's administration and delivery process.

No detailed learning outcomes appeared in the form of a written communication to the participants of the *AFS* workshop, over and above that which appeared in the title *Creating and Defining Memorable Characters*. Everyone was clear at this stage exactly what the learning outcome was, not just as objective, but also as a deliverable with a deadline. That was exactly the overall objective that participants had invested their time and money in achieving. But this was allied as part of the publicity to the fact that Yvette Kaplan from US would be presenting as part of the course. If we recall the ethos used to found the initiative we can see how each principle or value is active as a 'learning outcome' and integral to how the whole workshop was managed. There was a very tight and direct relationship between the learning outcome, the participants' current skills level and the new skills that had to be acquired. Participants had only to apply the skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes they had approached the challenge with. Collaboration and play could consequently be moved to immediately. This appeared to have a direct impact upon the participants' behaviour, motivation and attitudes towards their learning process.

When we break down the skills we find a cascade of other attributes that need to be applied in order for the participant to achieve this objective and reach the 'end of the level'. These included self-direction, communication skills, interpersonal skills, creative thinking, management of time and resources, problem solving and decision-making. But again, these were never actually spelled out to the participants in that level of detail. They did not need to be: They simply cascaded out from the main objective and were implicit in the form, composition and structure of the workshop.

The learning outcomes of the taught masters module were written nearly 2 years prior to the admission of the cohort studied. There was therefore the distinct possibility that the learning outcomes as communicated to the student might have been different to the learning outcomes as taught, learned, demonstrated and measured in the student's assessment products. Indeed, any change in staffing and the

approach to the learning and assessment methods could have been entirely different producing different learning outcomes for the student. And as we shall see, few would be any wiser because the assessment, double marking and feedback mechanisms appear to have their own validation built in. As it was, the same tutor in this case was engaged ensuring that the central objective, *to write, plan and develop a 'professional' proposal for the digital entertainment industry* remained at the core of the module's activity. The practice of leaving learning outcomes within Module descriptors deliberately 'wide' or 'with enough latitude' for changes to be made at the last minute is well known within Higher Education. This may be to allow a fast response to the need of the economy and industry for more specific skills. But it may also render one essential communication tool between vendor and consumer problematic. The first casualty though is the consumer's trust in the authority of the organisation and the negative impact that that can have on their learning process and *enjoyment* of their learning experience. What this study shows is that all learning outcomes were achieved best in the context of the participants actually *doing* what they wanted to do.

In both case studies, participants responded positively to practical aspects of the learning outcome, which upholds Knowles (1998) notion that adult learners are task oriented in their learning and have a deep psychological need to be self-directing. And there appears to be a direct benefit to adult learners doing this in as close to the actual professional context and environment as possible. Daines (1994) stresses just how by simply providing students with *realistic* outcomes, a tutor's genuine interest and *enjoyment* of their discipline, and the recognition that they are adults and should be therefore treated accordingly can improve upon the students' motivation and affect the following outcomes: self direction, life skills, problem solving, planning and *curiosity*.

Going forward then, a constant awareness of the different nature and functions of the learning outcomes - and what they are actually achieving in each case - is critical. When it comes to the question of exactly *what* is communicated to the student in the form of written module descriptors, less appears to be, generally, more. The learning outcome as objective just needs to be expressed succinctly in order to ensure that the student's expected behaviour towards a specific objective - and its' deadline - is clear, whether it be communicated through the module descriptor, the marketing effort and/or the module title itself. There is then much less latitude for the institution to be able to deliver anything less than the student's successful and *enjoyable* completion of their objectives.

iii) Teaching and Learning Methods

The computer games analogy is again useful as many incorporate 'tutorial or training levels during which players are given chance to practice and rehearse the behaviours and skills they will need to get through the level and achieve its objective successfully. In order to categorise further the different teaching and learning approaches deployed across the two studies it's also worth here recalling Lewis Elton's (1977) taxonomy. Elton separated out 'mass, group and individualised teaching methods' and saw how certain roles were appropriate for teachers and students in each case. The methods that came closest to providing Elton's 'individualised' teaching proved most useful in the context of this study.

Elton calls the lecture format 'mass instruction' where the role of the teacher is considered to be 'expository and unidirectional'. This mode was used in both cases and the comparison is striking. The Masters Programme relied upon a three-hour lecture slot every week for thirteen weeks regardless of the content and learning objectives. It is considered immutable within that particular culture that all students and the lecturer - or a visiting lecturer - are expected to be present each week, regardless of any specific module outcomes, activities or requirements. The danger here, for Elton, was that the students could remain largely passive. The three-hour lecture period was therefore divided into three sections; a short lecture of between 30-40 minutes delivered at the beginning of - or in some cases where the subsequent group work was designed to challenge students' knowledge and assumptions - at the end of each class. This was followed by a questions and answers session and a workshop each week. Although student note taking and the questions and answers sessions certainly helped students by making them more active, the problem for Elton of this more authoritarian approach was that the student is still entirely *dependent* upon what is delivered, how and by whom. This approach subjected the participants to an overall passive rather than active role and 'play' was again less likely to become engendered as a significant part of the learning process.

The *AFS* workshop took place over two days only and included 'presentations' rather than lectures. The different terminology used here is interesting: Although the 'lecture' format was exactly the same in each case - one person stood in front of and speaking to many, expository and unidirectional - the notion of 'lecturing' seems completely inappropriate in a CPD context. It may be that we need to draw this language - and culture - more fully into the Post Graduate experience and accept that Post Graduate students are as much adults and as much customers as the more explicitly 'fee paying' participant of the CPD experience. Participant feedback demonstrated the extent to which the *AFS* participants considered the presentation content to be appropriate for their level of attainment and entirely relevant for the task they were about to encounter. All of the 'content' that was required to ensure that participants had the appropriate knowledge to achieve their objective - their learning outcome - was delivered in over just three hours. This raises the obvious question as to the best allocation of industry expertise and staff time within a post-graduate context, particularly when the outputs are similar.

Both courses used workshops throughout, but to different degrees and effect. In the post-graduate module role-playing scenarios were used in order to encourage collaboration, communication, confidence and innovation. And the lecturer's role there was to become one of 'steering, facilitation and support.' As Elton (1977) pointed out, this group situation allowed students to act more *inter-dependently*. Students presented their projects or an aspect of it that was relevant to the taught material of the previous week and other students were encouraged to provide comment, reflect upon and offer creative solutions and insights that would further aid the development of the students' projects and critical skills. The *AFS* workshops were overall much less reliant upon *role-play* and more upon *play* itself within the parameters of professional practice. Participants could choose, on entry, to develop a character or characters that they had brought with them, or, as was more popular, opt to collaborate within the groups to create completely new characters. The groups of 3-4 were constituted to include at least one writer. Participants then

began creating their character(s). The goal was to create a 1.5 minute scenario through which to introduce their character(s) to a new audience - and then to perform that scenario in front of the other groups. At this stage, the groups were constrained to writing and performance methods of developing character only. By constraining the groups in this way the proprietors could ensure that creativity operated within the framework of those strategies alone: On no account could participants interface with computers to develop visual artefacts or could visuals of any form however primitive be used. Everything about the characters and their relationships had to be communicated through performance and play. The conceptual focus that this gave to the creation of the characters, their relationships to one another and to their inner lives, was tangible in the final products.

All participants in *the AFS* adopted their appropriate professional roles, attitudes and the critical and editorial lexicon of industry as part of their professional concept development almost automatically. Colleagues were then asked to provide critical comment, reflect upon or offer creative solutions and insights that would further aid the development of the participant's project and critical skills. Collaboration, communication, confidence and innovation were encouraged here because all participants were treated as actually 'belonging to' the appropriate professional context rather than 'pretending' they belonged to it. The participants' attitudes, communication skills, collaborative efforts and motivation levels were significantly more professional all round.

The tutors' roles within the *AFS* were also different, much closer to a mentorship function. Tutors were able to provide more individualised teaching because of the smaller group sizes and pull upon their own professional experience more directly and more usefully; in fact their roles became that of developers, developing the participants' projects - for which the participants were doing all of the actual work and considering themselves still wholly responsible. The tutors provided project management and professional level guidance and were able to point to strategies and resources that were directly appropriate in each individual case. They also provided feedback and support enabling the participant to take control of their own learning, its resources and trajectory immediately.

Biggs' (2003) distinction between teacher, peer and self-directed modes of learning is supported here. For Biggs, the lectures and presentations fall into more teacher-directed and the workshops offer a less authoritative presentation of the subject matter to the students. For Biggs, the student gains greater and deeper understanding of the subject matter by taking control of their learning, self-monitoring, self-assessing and self-motivating. In both case studies, the work required to deliver the core outcome, *the writing and development of a 'professional proposal or script'* was achieved to a great or lesser degree though their own endeavors. This study held up the benefits of Elton's 'individualized teaching' and Biggs' 'self-directed learning'.

It is worth noting here that any slide into the retention of too much control or 'air time' by the tutor might be seen to reduce the positive motivational impact of more self-directed and controlled study. Although the workshops delivered on the Masters module provided opportunities for peer supported, interdependent work any opportunity for one-to-one, or even one-to-three workshops with the mentor as

happened on *The AFS* simply had to be ruled out. 32 students were enrolled on this course as opposed to 21 on the *AFS* workshop. The relationship between the student and the teacher is certainly going to be different in every case. But it should be carried forward that more project management, provision of resources and guidance by the lecturer doesn't necessarily equate to better teaching methods in the context of adult education. Indeed, it can be argued that the greater the staff involvement the less independent the student and ironically the greater their possible sense of isolation rather than belonging and the consequent reduction in the capacity to 'play'.

Assessment and Feedback

Most successful games assess players' performance 'on the fly' and feedback is given to players regularly, immediately following the player's desired action or behaviour. Indeed, game theory suggests that this repeated behaviour-feedback-reward cycle is a critical component in maintaining a player's enjoyment of play. The parallel with assessment cycles in Higher Education and CPD is again useful and a consideration of the number, frequency and quality of assessment and feedback points when evaluating the case studies begins to illuminate where improvements might be made.

The assessment scheme within the Masters module comprised of two assessment points over thirteen weeks. The first required the students to submit an outline of their concept and the second, the full proposal. The first assessment point was designed to ensure that all students had, by week five, understood and could demonstrate an understanding of the material delivered within the lectures to that date. This assessment measured the extent to which the basics of current digital media design processes had been learned. The outlines submitted demonstrated a healthy range of grades in the mid to high-level with some distinctions. Most students had therefore demonstrated that they had learned effectively and their relative understanding of the knowledge imparted during lectures to date had been demonstrated.

The second assessment at week 13 measured more closely the degree to which students had understood and could demonstrate their understanding of the roles, language, practice and process of the interactive industry and their ability to manage, research and present projects at a professional level, as outlined in the module's stated outcomes. All students demonstrated their relative understanding and assimilation of the material taught by performing a 5-7 minute pitch to the tutors and by submitting their completed proposals in both paper and electronic form. The standard of the proposals and presentations was, overall, good and the industry panel of two responded well. This appears to reinforce the value of the module's taught content and the assessment methods used to measure the students' understanding of it. But were the appropriate industry skills acquired?

Rather than focusing upon the level of professionalism and innovation in the content of their developing projects the majority of students preferred to focus upon the outcomes and process of the formally submitted and assessed material. They were keen to adhere to the exact word count for instance and the 'official' format of University assessment documents. Students treated these as *the* salient documents

and processes, exactly as they would be expected to do when their 'performance' is being judged on that basis.

Marton and Entwistle's (1997) work identifies 'surface, strategic and deep approaches' to learning and point out many mature students face conflicting demands on their time and deliberately adopt a 'strategic' approach. This was evident here: Students' behaviour had become strategic. The very existence of the formal assessment schedule at the heart of the Masters module appears to have predisposed them to behave in a certain way towards their learning process. Their attention was distracted from the overall objective to *plan, write and develop a professional proposal for the digital media industry*. Yes, they gained the knowledge and understanding of the course's content as measured by the assessments but part of their focus and efforts had been invested in acquiring the knowledge and understanding of how best to get the best grades.

Although students received feedback the demands in terms of time and resources to take a *summative* snapshot and provide detailed feedback prevented industry experts from working more closely with the students in a supportive mentoring capacity. In the taught masters a total of 64 documents had to be double-marked before written feedback could be provided and grades given as part of the University's assessment and feedback requirements. All of the students' work had to be marked by the lecturer and then double-marked by another within the University structure who did not have the relevant industry experience at *both* assessment points. This meant that tutors could only feed back to students after two to three weeks. And the validity of that assessment in relation to industry expertise was weakened because of the relative lack of industry expertise in the department in this area. And this is even before we consider how the students themselves might feel and how it may impact upon their motivation levels. This, Hounsell (2007) argues, results 'in a collective disillusionment with feedback'. He writes

"Student disenchantment mounts when the feedback they get...is too sparsely uninformative, or unconstructive or comes late to be of any practical use. Their faith in its value to them as learners therefore begins to wane"

Hounsell's view was upheld here. The time taken to grade and double-mark the first outlines and then to provide feedback in writing to the students was longer than is useful in the post graduate context particularly where industry skills are being developed and assessed. Students had to continue working on their practical projects without having received the 'official' feedback of how they performed on their outline and without written analysis as to their strengths and weaknesses. This is true of most practical modules in this field and owes, in part, to the demands of the double-marking process itself and the short window within which it has to be done. A workaround might be to ensure that students received feedback on their performance verbally, informally and regularly so that they could still incorporate their feedback into their practical work before receiving the 'official' feedback in writing. But in terms of student validation and satisfaction in this case that was not enough. Feedback, as it pertains to their grades, has to go through the official channels. And the process of reporting verbally takes an increasing amount of staff time that is simply not allocated.

Assessment and feedback mechanisms are considered to be essential components of the management of student learning

at Post Graduate Level. The *AFS* required no *formal* assessment and feedback schedule. In the context of CPD courses run independently and on a fee-paying basis the notion of any formal 'assessment' seemed alien, patronising even. All participants performed their work in teams and their proposals took the form of a written scene, a performance of that scene, accompanying conceptual artwork in the form of stills, storyboards and character sketches and then a revised performance. The mentors assessed iterations regularly and provided feedback immediately; the appropriate, and professional, development strategy was therefore afforded to each participant and their project. It was the *formative* nature of these *informal* assessment processes that gave them their value. Feedback was given directly to participants without delay, allowing them to be aware *always* of how they were *performing* relative, not just to each other or industry standards but also to themselves. This ipsative-referenced approach to assessment meant that participants could measure their own performance relative to their earlier efforts. The individual was at any one time in a position to assess their new skills relative to their previous ones and to monitor their own progress in between objectives or milestones. This proved to be a popular and invaluable approach and formed the core of *AFS's* andragogic as opposed to pedagogic approach. And it was this immediacy that allowed participants to move on, further collaborate and 'play'. This practice mimics the process of collaboration, communication, innovation and *iteration* during development in industry. Participants were able to stay focused on their practical work without having to step back and submit an assignment for a formal, summative 'snapshot' of their work as did the students on the taught masters programme. It was the numerous and frequent feedback loop between the participant and industry mentor that made this particular form of tutelage invaluable for the participant: And they remained motivated and directed all of their efforts towards the final objective.

It should, at the very least be possible to ensure that students within Higher Education are exposed to professional time constraints and the attendant pace of communication, collaboration and iteration. But they need guidance and support; in short they need *mentorship*. If this had been possible during the Masters module, students could have rehearsed their industry skills to exactly the same level of those who were taking the CPD course. The fact that industry practitioners were engaged by the University and involved in the administration of the summative assessment meant that their time was allocated away from the students for 2-3 weeks at a time during which time, any healthy mentor/mentored relationship would normally have broken down. Two to three weeks out of a 13 week cycle to allow the institutional wheels to turn is unsatisfactory. Indeed in this case students failed to take as full ownership of their *individualised* learning and development process as they might have done, and as did their counterparts on the *AFS*.

Formal assessment points are however just one way to assess how a student is performing; another is to ask them. Post Graduate students' responses were, again, exclamatory! 'Brilliant Course!' said one. Overall the final feedback suggested that the module had helped students prepare for the submission process that they would encounter in industry and that they had been 'introduced to a whole new world'. Students also felt that because they were putting into practice directly the content covered in lectures and seminars, they benefited by being engaged in a 'live' development process to some extent. Students were also motivated because they had developed their own intellectual properties. Overall then

the postgraduate students demonstrated that they had achieved the level of learning that Marton et al (1997) refer to as 'deep learning'. They felt that the course had changed their career trajectory in a very real and positive way and had altered the way they viewed the industry as a whole. Students reported how they had enjoyed being able to rehearse, not just their writing and presentation abilities but also their sense of self-worth, their satisfaction and their improved confidence. This aligns with what Biggs (2003) called 'transformative learning' where 'students don't just reproduce the knowledge and relate it to their previous ideas and understanding but they engage with it, transform it and make it their own'. Students were, in short, empowered to act as if they were operating in a sector that they had little or no previous experience of. Boud (2000) calls this approach 'sustainable assessment' which he defines as 'assessment which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own future learning needs'.

There is of course a paradox here: whilst students of the Masters programme had not benefitted from a high exposure to international industry professionals, performance and play as part of their development practice and frequent iterations with immediate feedback they had enjoyed and benefitted from their trajectory immensely, as their feedback evidenced. This paradox is owing to the qualitative difference between Higher Education and Continuing Professional practice. As we have seen, the institutionalisation of assessment practices alone can actually mitigate against the teaching of industry based skills development and a culture within which play can take place. This runs counter to the orthodox position that assumes that assessment processes can only *benefit* a student's learning. As these practices form part of the institutional and cultural fabric, it is unlikely that any changes are made. It is quite clear that opportunities for creative 'play' to exist and function in any sense remain limited institutionally and culturally within Higher Education. And in the interests of good expectations management though, it became urgent, particularly in Post Graduate context that student and industry are clear as to exactly can and cannot be taught at this level.

Conclusion

Going forward then, it is quite clear that where there *is* an economic argument for demand-led industry skills, it needs to be made abundantly clear to government, industry and customers alike that the courses taught at Post Graduate modules are actually most likely and able to be more theoretical, less practical and less likely to engender industry ready skills. And that this is owing to the *cost* of engaging lecturers with industry skills and expertise and the most effective *management* of that resource. CPD initiatives in this area are more likely to offer a more direct and higher level of industry expertise or exposure to it. And as long as that expertise *is* afforded allocated most effectively in the form of mentorship, individual appraisal and support we can go a long way towards developing professional skills, should that opportunity or level be made available by the University, *chosen* by the client and enjoyed as an affirmative life experience.

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