

CILECT CONFERENCE 2011 / FAMU, PRAGUE

“EXPLORING THE FUTURE OF FILM & MEDIA EDUCATION”

BENCHMARKING WIKIPEDIA

Like all good media students, began my research on Wikipedia. The derivation of the concept of benchmarking is that shoemakers would put the customer's foot on the bench and make a mark around either foot, in order to know what size to make the shoe.

CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN TWO SCENARIOS

Want to emphasise that I am approaching this very much from a common or garden lecturer's perspective :

Not a dean or a rector or a head of a film school : I teach every day, so I am making this presentation from the perspective of how I am encountering benchmarking on the shop floor.

Both scenarios entail us ensuring that our ethos and practical focus is industry facing.

FIRSTLY, DEVELOPING AN MA IN FACTUAL MEDIA / WILDLIFE FILM MAKING WITH BBC FACTUAL AND THE BBC NATURAL HISTORY UNIT

Working in conjunction with the BBC, so that the course that we design can map onto their own standards and protocols.

MA in Wildlife Film making will be one of only two courses in Europe.

Scenario comes out of the Anchor Bristol project between the City of Bristol, UWE and the BBC : to ensure the foundation and sustainable development of creative and cultural activity within the city.

Emphasis on professional partnerships.

We have to write our programme specification and validation documentation in a way that the BBC understands : but also we have to write them in a way that observes some of their own institutional standards and protocols.

SECONDLY, UWE APPLYING FOR SKILLSET ACCREDITATION

“Skillset is the industry body which supports skills and training for people and businesses to ensure the UK creative industries maintain their world class position.”

“Skillset is the Creative Industries' Sector Skills Council (SSC) which comprises TV, film, radio, interactive media, animation, computer games, facilities, photo imaging, publishing, advertising and fashion and textiles.”

Also worth mentioning that all HE courses in the UK have to go through QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) : interestingly Media Practice is part of the Art & Design QAA not Media Cultural Communications.

3 Skillset Film Academies in the UK and 23 Media Academies

UWE applying as a Media Academy that will incorporate course in Photography, Graphic Design, Fashion, Animation and Fine Art.

Skillset : mapping the media practice curriculum against National Occupational Standards.

Skillset are inviting us to apply as a Skillset academy.

Skillset as kitemarking

Demonstrating that the content of the course delivers against NOS is a reassurance for industry : essentially an assurance of quality.

Process that we submit all our documentation by 16th January.

National Occupational Standards but also looking at creative briefs, production processes, quality of student work, dissemination of work.

Then Skillset visit UWE in May

PERFORMANCE BASED ASSESSMENT VERSUS ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Make it too performance based and it becomes reductive.

Make it too cerebral and it loses any contact with reality, let alone the jobs market.

But need to ensure that there is a space to reward qualities like creativity, imagination, good storytelling, risk taking, theoretical understanding, and deeper thinking.

Ideally NOS will be embedded within the broader creative production brief.

But also presumably not just about measuring and assuring standards but actually improving them.

BOTH SCENARIOS DEMAND A MORE INDUSTRY FACING APPROACH

I think we're all very clear that we want our students to be employable : we want them to have a strong chance of actually working in this industry.

And also there is undeniably a real audit culture in the UK : an anglo-saxon rationalistic obsession with measuring, naming and categorizing everything.

But we also want to preserve the more thoughtful, creative and cerebral aspects of what we do : and some of these qualities remain immeasurable.

And actually these two things are intrinsically interlinked. We should be producing graduates with editorial and creative vision, which will only come through the kind of education that engages on a deeper level.

The trick is to find a good marriage between the demands of industry and the free creative space that a film school environment can offer.

RETURN TO THE FOOT ANALOGY

How well will the shoe fit ? Will it feel like the beginning of a long acquaintance or will we develop bunions, feel uncomfortable, and in the worst case scenario inhibit our ability to walk properly ?

Need to preserve the free creative space of the film school environment, whilst acknowledging the requirements and the opportunities that this kind of benchmarking can offer, particularly in terms of the employability prospects of the young people on our courses.