New Learning Spaces
1st Year BA Honours in Visual Arts Practice

site-specific project work using online publishing tools for reflection and critique; and the creation of a visual dynamic archive of project work completed off campus.

http://1styrvapiadt.wetpaint.com

Laurence Riddell and Lynda Devenney
Dun Laoghaire, Institute of Art and Design [IADT], Dublin, Ireland

Introduction to Institution

The School of Creative Arts is one of three schools located in IADT. The Creative Arts programmes push the conventional discipline boundaries through creative collaboration and interaction between programmes and the professional environment.

The B.A [Hons] in Visual Arts Practice [VAP] is a four year programme, within The School of Creative Arts, that is designed to provide the student with the opportunity to develop a practice which is relevant to the many opportunities which exist for artists and to understand the challenges of working in the visually and critically sophisticated landscape of contemporary art.

The student intake into the 1st year of the VAP programme is approximately 50 students with an age group between 18 to 40 years.

Rationale for the Project

The educational backgrounds of 1st Year VAP students vary from direct school leavers, portfolio preparation courses, PLC [Post Leaving Certificate] courses, FETAC [Further Education and Training Awards Council] and HETAC [Higher Education and Training Awards Council] courses.

The level of visual skills and technical competencies of the student intake are diverse. In response to this diversity and as an educational goal to establish the cognitive and motivational foundation from which expertise may emerge, we have endeavoured to deliver a programme of study that cultivates strategic thinking and processing in support of research autonomy and self–directed study. Through the development of a range of specific projects, students are given an opportunity, to practice strategies, to personalise or modify strategies and to transfer strategies to other problems and contexts. Effectively students become authors off their own learning experience.

One of a number of key projects developed to cultivate strategic thinking and processing in support of research autonomy and self-directed study is the site-specific project; which uses a location [off campus] as a starting point for the investigation and creation of a multi disciplinary body of research work. Working off campus is an important departure for students in that it moves them to go beyond the familiar while placing their learning more effectively by engaging students to find ways to experience new information first hand.

Project Information

Site-specific artwork has established a critical context within the international art world. It involves artwork that is created to exist in a certain place; the artist takes the location into account while planning and creating the artwork.

The Irish Museum of Modern Art [IMMA] a key cultural and national resource for the visual arts, was chosen as a location for the site-specific project. IMMA is the national cultural institution for the collection and presentation of modern and contemporary art in Ireland, exhibiting and collecting modern and contemporary art by established and emerging Irish and international artists.

The opportunity to collaborate with the museum was invaluable to the students learning experience, allowing them direct access to a rich and varied programme of events and an opportunity to collaborate with the museums eductional and artist residency programme. Equally benefical were the proivision of working studio spaces on site to process and develop research material.

The site- specific project has been running for the past two years with upwards of a hundred students. The duration of the project is four weeks and consists of proximity eighty hours of direct study.

Case Study

Key locations were identifed within the grounds of the museum as starting points for the gathering of research material. Students were encouraged to explore and develop their research work through a diverse range of approaches and treatments [Experiential Learning] and through the manipulation of traditional and non-traditional materials such as drawing, photography, sculpture and video.

An intrinsic part of the learning students undertake in the site-specific project is working towards self-direction and self-evaluation. As with other forms of strategic behaviour, students should be assisted to develop effective self direction and be provided with instruction that equips them to evaluate their thinking and learning. Web technology and to be more specific the Wiki was adopted as a tool to assist students in self-direction and self-evaluation. As part of the project outcomes students were asked to publish online all their video, audio, photographs, drawings and site-specific research and artwork.

Technology Used

We used Wetpaint Wiki - http://www.wetpaintcentral.com/ to create the Wiki and You Tube http://www.youtube.com/ to upload video files. When establishing the Wiki we decided that we needed to control the appearence and structure of the site so we put in place the following guidelines.

- Navigation structure is predetermined
- Restricted to registered users
- Permission to edit
- Moderated by staff

The Wiki offered the students a place to publish a record of their projects and a venue to share their artwork, receive feedback on their work from a local/ national/ international community. The Wiki also enabled the lecturers to have an accessible portal to view the research for continuous assessment and feedback.

Training and Preparation
Students were given lectures on the history of art practices concerned with artist's publications from the late 20th century. Examples were shown on how artists have made use of traditional media for the publication of their work ie: newspapers, books, television and examples of artist's current use of online publishing such as websites, blogs and pod casts to showcase their work.

In order to build on the tacit knowledge and the technical competencies of the student they were then taken as a group for step-by-step online instruction on how to register an account with and how to start uploading and editing the Wiki. They were shown how to upload images and how to embed video files on You Tube. They were given detailed notes on each aspect and were then asked as a group to set up their own group section and to upload their images and video files individually.

Evaluation

In order to assess the effectiveness of the project an evaluation was carried out by means of a questionnaire.

Student Questionnaire:
1.   In your opinion what was interesting about the project?
2.   How did the technology enable you to evaluate your work?
3.   Has this method of learning transferred into your future work practice?
4.   How effective did you find the technology to communicate your project to a wider audience?
5.   What would you change about the project if anything?

Results from questionnaires:
In relation to **Question 1**, 94% of students were positive regarding working off campus and in particular the collaboration with The Irish Museum of Modern Art.

 "Being able to work in IMMA for an entire month, being given studio space, experimenting with different methods in a site specific place, using the website the showcase our work." from Student 32(F)

"Getting out of the studio, working outside and responding to the particular space I was in. It was a very direct and authentic way of researching" from Student 4 (M)

In response to **Question 2**, students found the implementation of the wiki site beneficial in regards to self-direction, and self-evaluation.

"It helped me learn a method of organising my work, I have used the same method of breaking down my work into divisions and sub-divisions since the project" from Student 46 (F)

" The wiki site helped me put together my work in a way I could clearly look over my progress" from Student 27 (M)

Although we had anticipated that **Question 3** would cover visual research methods the majority of the feedback was primarily concerned with the implementation of the wiki.

"It has, during the project I set up my own website of a similar model for my work (personal and educational) and have been using it for a while. Its something that would be extremely useful in all projects as a motivator" from student 31 (M)

"Yes. The research methods I learned in the IMMA project I have hopefully carried over into my 2nd term project. It helped set up a solid foundation on which to experiment and eliminate or keep work." From student 20 (F)

In reply to **Question 4** the technology has given students an awareness of the audience and an opportunity to transfer and share their knowledge and research with that audience.

 "The web page created a great way to communicate our work to a wider audience" from student 19 (F)

In reply to **Question 5** the main points emerging from the students included the following:
(1) unfavourable weather conditions 21%; (2) the need for more time on location 21%; (3) more training for web/wiki 12%; (4) access to materials and equipment 10%; (5) would not change anything 29%.

Observation

Comparing the IMMA project with previous site-specific projects, we found a marked improvement in the student's ability to present clearly and informatively their research material. The use of the Wiki as a tool for self-direction and evaluation clearly motivated students to rehearse and reflect on the approaches taken in the development of their research and in doing so better equipped them to critically evaluate the outcomes of their work. The technology equally removed the boundaries and limitations on how one resources, shares, evaluates, discussses, interacts and involves others in the learning experience and creative response.

Students use of online publishing enriched their learning experience through sharing knowledge and creating dialogue within the group providing an opportunity to create an accessible archive for all involved. This inturn not only provided a permanent record of the project, it also developed into an important educational archive for the college and the museum to promote and receive feedback.

Conclusion

The collaboration with The Irish Museum of Modern Art has been beneficial in stimulating, captivating and focusing the student's engagement and application to their work. The final showcase of artwork and notebook work resulted in a higher standard of research and presentation.

In moving forward we intend to build the presence of cloud computing [Wiki etc.] within the project. This serves three purposes; first, as a learning and teaching tool that supports critical engagement, reflection and evaluation. Second, it gives the students an opportunity [within the context of the first year programme of study] to present their work to, and interact with a global audience. Finally, it provides a permanent record of the project, a document that builds from one year to the next as the relationship between the two Institutions evolve.