

## **Group video assessment in higher education large classes: Students' and educators' perspectives**

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### ***Abstract***

*The traditional academic essay is a popular mode of assessment in higher education. Designing alternative modes of assessment can be challenging, particularly for educators who teach large classes. This paper examines students' and educators' experiences of a group video assessment used with a large cohort of postgraduate students on an initial teacher education programme in an Irish university. Data was gathered through student questionnaires and focus groups and educator reflections and observations. Students reported that the assessment was challenging but enjoyable; gave them an opportunity to present their ideas creatively; and enabled them to consolidate their learning and discover new approaches to teaching. Educators found the group video to be a very time-efficient means of assessing large classes that challenged and motivated students; enhanced student engagement; fostered higher-order thinking through deep learning of the course material; facilitated group collaboration and discussions; and supported the principles of Universal Design for Learning.*

**Keywords:** *Group video assessment; Universal Design for Learning; large classes; higher education; initial teacher education; ChatGPT*

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## **1. Introduction**

Large class sizes continue to be a prevalent feature of Higher Education (HE). Identifying effective and efficient approaches to teaching, learning and assessment is an ongoing challenge for educators who teach large classes (Exeter et al., 2010; Maringe and Sing, 2014; Arsenis et al., 2022). The question of how to fairly and appropriately assess large numbers of students within the tight timeframes typically afforded to marking periods in the university calendar is of particular concern to educators (Broadbent et al., 2018; Mantai and Huber 2021). There is also a growing recognition of the need for a wider variety of assessment approaches (Hornsby and Osman, 2014; Kofinas and Tsay, 2021). This paper considers the use of group video assessment with a large class as experienced by students and educators on an initial teacher education programme in an Irish university.

## **2. Description of the Teaching/Learning Context**

The assessment outlined in this paper relates to a module on fostering creativity and innovation in post-primary education delivered to 130 postgraduate students over a twelve week semester. The model followed a blended format with both face to face and synchronous online delivery. The module aims to enhance student-teachers' creativity and empower them to design effective and creative learning experiences that promote the creativity and agency of all learners. Over the course of the module, students are introduced to a variety of pedagogical approaches from the fields of digital media, drama, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness. This interdisciplinary approach provides student-teachers with an opportunity to explore and experience a range of creative approaches to fostering creativity with a view to enabling them to make effective use of these tools and strategies in their professional practice. Given the module's focus on creativity, a creative approach to assessment was deemed essential. It was imperative that student-teachers were given an opportunity to demonstrate their personal and professional creativity in meeting the intended learning outcomes. The assessment required students to collaboratively and imaginatively create a video demonstrating how the various tools, skills and strategies explored in the module might be used to promote pupil creativity at post-primary level. Students were given the choice of either self-selection or random allocation and groups were formed according to individual student preferences. Average group size was six.

The videos submitted by the groups were 10 minutes in length, extremely varied and often highly imaginative and creative. For example, some groups submitted videos in the form of a traditional lecture using PowerPoint and voiceovers, often interspersed with dramatic enactments of classroom practice or examples of pupils' work; other groups used discussion platforms such as podcasts, Zoom breakout rooms or interviews as the format

for their video; some groups took narrative approaches such as ‘A Day in the Life’ or ‘School Open Day’ videos.

### 3. Literature Review

The trend towards *massification* in HE, described by Hornby and Osman (2014, p. 712) as “a term used to describe the rapid increase in student enrolment that was witnessed towards the end of the twentieth century” has become a normalised feature of university life and has inevitably led to an accompanying increase in class sizes in the sector (Cuseo, 2007; Maringe and Sing, 2014; Lund Dean and Wright, 2017). This increase in enrolments has often occurred without a proportional increase in staffing or resources and against the simultaneous reality of decreased funding for HE (Hornsby and Osman, 2014; Mantai and Huber, 2021).

There is no accepted definition in the literature as to the numerical threshold for identifying a class as large or consensus as to the optimal class size for effective university learning, as both can vary according to discipline, institution and mode of delivery among other factors. However, there is consensus that classes can be considered large when the size of the class affects the quality of the learning experience. Maringe and Sing (2014, p. 763) define large classes as “any class where numbers of students pose both perceived and real challenges in the delivery of quality and equal learning opportunities to all students in that classroom”. Many studies on large class teaching focus on classes with more than 100 students (Cuseo, 2007, Exeter et al., 2010; Kofinas and Tsay, 2021).

Until recently, the literature on large classes in HE tended to focus on the problems brought about by increased class numbers. Among the many challenges and adverse effects associated with large class teaching in HE contexts are an increased reliance on more passive lecture-style delivery modes, a decrease in the frequency and quality of student-instructor interaction and feedback, a decrease in course satisfaction among students, and greater difficulty in personalising the learning experience for the student (Cuseo, 2007; Maringe and Sing, 2014; Mantai and Huber 2021). In particular, large classes have been strongly linked to greater student dis-engagement and reduced opportunities for experiential learning approaches and a corresponding lack of deep learning of course content on the part of students (Cuseo, 2007; Exeter et al., 2010; Lund Dean and Wright, 2017). Many educators believe the sheer size and anonymity of large classes mitigate against active learning pedagogies and student-centred approaches and make it easier for students to ‘hide’ in the crowd and switch off from the learning process (Maringe and Sing, 2014; Mantai and Huber, 2021). Recently, the literature has begun to highlight certain benefits to large classes in HE, such as embracing the potential for “socialized experiential learning” (Kofinas and Tsay, 2021, p. 765) which can happen

when learners are pushed out of their comfort zone through meaningful interaction with 'others'. Likewise, Mantai and Huber (2021) describe the affordances provided by the greater diversity of cultures and perspectives found in large classes to enrich learning for all. In terms of inclusive practice and student engagement, Fovet (2022) posits that the fear that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) application is unrealistic and unachievable in large university classes is misplaced.

The impact of large classes on the quality and design of assessment practices poses particular challenges. Issues to do with increased teacher workload, reduced formative and individual feedback and achieving grade consistency across multiple markers have been raised (Glazer, 2014; Broadbent et al., 2018). In addition, multiple-choice testing and other assessment techniques which are easier and quicker to mark but which often rely on memorisation of knowledge at the expense of more in-depth processing of ideas have been found to be used more frequently than essay writing with large classes (Cuseo, 2007; Maringe and Sing, 2014). The need to adapt to the challenges posed by the massification of HE has seen increased calls to explore ways in which higher order cognitive skills and experiential learning can be fostered in assessment practices and for more effective alignment of assessment with course learning outcomes (Hornsby and Osman, 2014; Maringe and Sing, 2014; Lund Dean and Wright, 2017; Broadbent et al., 2018; Kofinas and Tsay, 2021; Mantai and Huber, 2021).

The use of video as an assessment tool has been identified as a highly engaging and challenging alternative to traditional written essays and multiple-choice quizzes (Arsenis et al., 2022). Video has also been identified as an example of an assessment strategy that fosters students' creative and critical thinking abilities and helps combat the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) text generators such as ChatGPT (Rudolph et al., 2023). To date, this approach to assessment has been largely underused in HE despite the affordances it offers students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes (Jorm et al., 2019).

## **4. Empirical Methodology/Data**

### ***4.1. Methodology***

Qualitative data was gathered through open-ended questions posed in an anonymous survey and a focus group with students. Reflections and observations were recorded by educators. The data was qualitatively coded and analysed using Thematic Analysis procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in order to identify key issues, insights and recurring themes. This paper focuses on the theme of assessment.

#### **4.2. Key Findings**

Students enjoyed the collaborative aspect of the assignment and found the process of working with peers helped them to engage critically with the core concepts of the module and clarify their understanding of ‘creativity’ and how others perceive it:

*It forced us to analyse the course content critically (Survey).*

*It was really really helpful to hear other people's perception of the assignment and what they thought creativity was. I think that's the thing I actually learned from the most (Focus Group).*

*The video assignment meant we had to work in a different kind of way. Being part of a group meant we had to work together to make sense of it and [...]what other people would consider to be creative (Focus Group).*

*I thought it was really helpful to consolidate what the ‘being creative’ element of the Junior Cycle means [...] in particular, the group assignment helped clarify it for me. Now I understand what they want and what being creative looks like in the classroom (Focus Group).*

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The group collaboration facilitated UDL and allowed members of the group to play to their individual strengths. Students welcomed the opportunity to present information in a different way and enjoyed the challenge of expressing their ideas through a different medium.

*A picture speaks a thousand words so I found the video gave me more freedom than an essay (Survey).*

*I normally do not like group assignments but this one worked particularly well as it involved different aspects which appealed to our different ways of presenting information (Survey).*

*I enjoyed the assessment, one of the only assessments I can say that for. It was interesting using a new tool such as Adobe and being pushed outside of your comfort zone of just speaking over PowerPoint (Survey).*

The data also suggests that the group video assignment helped students to apply their knowledge effectively and to see how they could implement creative approaches in their professional practice:

*I think the idea of getting kids to put together a project, whether it's a video or PowerPoint or literally a storyboard or an animation is a really good way of getting them to present back information that they've learnt (Focus Group).*

*I found lots of creative ideas for teaching new topics that I wouldn't have otherwise discovered. I've tried out a few new activities with my students and been blown away from some of the creative answers and approaches to problem solving (Survey).*

*I was thinking about ways that I could get students to do a project, so they could do a storyboard where they write everything out and then do a little video on coronary heart disease, or whatever. (Survey).*

A few students remarked on the sense of pride and achievement they felt from having completed the assignment. This was especially the case for students who expressed a lack of expertise with digital skills. They spoke about how the confidence and satisfaction they had gained from the process of creating a video had a positive impact on their ability to implement similar approaches in their practice in the future:

*I'm not very confident on the IT side, so I was really proud of myself. I felt a real sense of achievement from the assignment. It really pushed me beyond what I'm*

*comfortable with [...] I'd be much more comfortable getting students to do a task like that now (Survey)*

*I was very nervous about the video, but it pushed me out of my comfort zone and I really had fun playing with the content and felt a real sense of achievement at the end. I certainly have the confidence to use Adobe spark with my students either as a resource or allow them to make a movie (Survey).*

*Having to complete a video was a good way to get to grips with the application and expand this skill into other areas e.g., sharpening up my resources in class and thinking about how I present information (Survey).*

Many students seemed to like being 'pushed out of their comfort zone' and appreciated how the assessment challenged and inspired them to consider new possibilities and approaches:

*The assessment approach was something I had not done before and completely pushed me out of my comfort zone and forced me to try new resources and technologies (Survey).*

## **5. Analysis of/Reflection on/Implications for Practice**

### **5.1 Educators' Reflections and Observations**

Reflections and observations of the three educators who taught the module are documented here. Responses to the assignment brief were of a high standard and demonstrated high levels of collaboration and student engagement. Overall, we felt that the assignment format promoted deep learning and high-order cognitive engagement with the learning process which was also reflected in many of the students' comments. We were struck by how UDL principles were enacted through this type of assessment. For example, it was evident from many of the videos created that, for the most part, students enjoyed designing the content and embraced the opportunity to showcase their creativity. It was clear that the group video assignment enabled students to demonstrate their knowledge using multiple means of action and expression. This finding aligns with Fovet's (2022) view that UDL principles can and should be utilised within large classes. Like Kofinas and Tsay (2021) and Mantai and Huber (2021), who both highlight the enhanced opportunities provided by large classes for leveraging the social dimensions of learning, we found that the large class allowed students to experience a greater variety of diverse perspectives, cultures and outlooks during the collaborative process.

The assessment not only benefited student learning, it also helped us to manage our workload more efficiently without sacrificing cognitive engagement or higher order

thinking, a challenge that has been frequently associated with large classes (Glazer, 2014; Maringe and Sing, 2014; Broadbent et al., 2018). The student effort in terms of reading, discussion and reflection was condensed into one 10 minute video end-product per group. The videos were engaging to watch and relatively straightforward to mark. We had concerns about marking initially but found that we could apply the marking scheme in the same way as a traditional academic essay. The practical demonstration of skills, a key feature of the assessment brief, aligned particularly well with the module learning outcomes and was facilitated effectively by the use of the video format.

### ***5.2 Implications for Practice***

Based on our experience, group video assessment has several benefits for educators and students alike. We found the group video to be a very time-efficient means of assessing large classes that is less time-consuming to grade than a large number of individual written essays, but, at the same time, challenges and motivates students to perform beyond the demands typically required in multiple-choice assessment formats. In addition, the video format enhances student engagement; fosters higher order thinking through deep learning of the course material; facilitates group collaboration and discussions; and enables students to work to their strengths and the diverse skills within a group, thus supporting the principles of UDL. Furthermore, this type of collaborative video assessment aligns well with current calls such as that of Rudolph et al. (2023), for creative assessment design to counter the use of ChatGPT and other forms of AI generated assignments.

For educators considering using group video as an assessment tool, we believe that the above findings should provide some encouragement. However, it should be noted that in the context of our study, digital media was a specific strand within this module, and therefore, students were provided with the relevant technical support. This is unlikely to be the case in most modules, so it is important for educators considering using group video as a means of assessment to consider how students might be supported in their use of technology. However, in our experience, the technological 'know-how' needed for the design and creation of the finished product was not overly demanding or beyond the digital literacy skills of most students in an Irish university context. Therefore, concerns about technical skills should not be a deterrent to educators nor detract from the benefits of using group video as a tool for assessment with large classes in HE.



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