Communication Idol: Using popular culture to catalyse active learning by engaging students in the development of entertaining teaching and learning resources

Tinashe Dune
Western Sydney University, t.dune@westernsydney.edu.au

John Bidewell
Western Sydney University, j.bidewell@uws.edu.au

Rubab Firdaus
Western Sydney University, r.firdaus@uws.edu.au

Morwenna Kirwan
Western Sydney University, mkirwan@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp

Communication Idol: Using popular culture to catalyse active learning by engaging students in the development of entertaining teaching and learning resources

Abstract

Bringing popular culture to tertiary education can potentially increase student engagement with learning tasks and content, especially when the learning task has students producing the content. Using a single-group intervention plus post-test design, this study implemented and evaluated a purposely developed learning and teaching innovation capitalising on popular and consumer culture to promote active over passive learning in a large, interprofessional health science unit. Students were invited to develop educational video presentations in a friendly competition based on high-rating television musical and vocal talent quests, with cash prizes based on peer ratings, this being the intervention. From a cohort of 569 students in 12 undergraduate allied health programs, 14 students in seven teams of 1 to 3 students produced seven, high-quality videos about communication in professional health practice, and recorded their experiences of doing so. Ratings showed the majority found the process fun (85%) and instructive (64%), with 29% finding the task harder than expected. The prospect of prizes along with intrinsic motivators were reasons for producing a video. A further 285 students viewed the productions and for extra marks completed evaluation of the videos' educational value. Videos were perceived as an educationally valuable yet entertaining way to engage unit content. Producers of videos rated the teaching and learning experience significantly more positively than students not involved in production. Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses supported relevant numerical findings. Barriers to producing videos were identified as time, resources, confidence and lack of a team. Results should encourage educators contemplating similar initiatives. The project highlights benefits of harnessing popular genres with which students identify, to encourage involvement in producing educationally justifiable content that rewards both performer and audience. The project shows how learning content and tasks created and presented in familiar and entertaining formats can catalyse students' agentic engagement in tertiary curricula.

Communication Idol: Using popular culture to catalyse active learning by engaging students in the development of entertaining teaching and learning resources

Tinashe Dune
Western Sydney University, t.dune@westernsydney.edu.au

John Bidewell
Western Sydney University, j.bidewell@uws.edu.au

Rubab Firdaus
Western Sydney University, r.firdaus@uws.edu.au

Morwenna Kirwan
Western Sydney University, mkirwan@gmail.com

Communication Idol: Using popular culture to catalyse active learning by engaging students in the development of entertaining teaching and learning resources

Abstract

Bringing popular culture to tertiary education can potentially increase student engagement with learning tasks and content, especially when the learning task has students producing the content. Using a single-group intervention plus post-test design, this study implemented and evaluated a purposely developed learning and teaching innovation capitalising on popular and consumer culture to promote active over passive learning in a large, interprofessional health science unit. Students were invited to develop educational video presentations in a friendly competition based on high-rating television musical and vocal talent quests, with cash prizes based on peer ratings, this being the intervention. From a cohort of 569 students in 12 undergraduate allied health programs, 14 students in seven teams of 1 to 3 students produced seven, high-quality videos about communication in professional health practice, and recorded their experiences of doing so. Ratings showed the majority found the process fun (85%) and instructive (64%), with 29% finding the task harder than expected. The prospect of prizes along with intrinsic motivators were reasons for producing a video. A further 285 students viewed the productions and for extra marks completed evaluation of the videos' educational value. Videos were perceived as an educationally valuable yet entertaining way to engage unit content. Producers of videos rated the teaching and learning experience significantly more positively than students not involved in production. Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses supported relevant numerical findings. Barriers to producing videos were identified as time, resources, confidence and lack of a team. Results should encourage educators contemplating similar initiatives. The project highlights benefits of harnessing popular genres with which students identify, to encourage involvement in producing educationally justifiable content that rewards both performer and audience. The project shows how learning content and tasks created and presented in familiar and entertaining formats can catalyse students' agentic engagement in tertiary curricula.

Keywords

Introduction

Within an increasingly competitive higher education market, universities must cater to students' needs and wants. The pervasiveness of consumer culture (Sandel 2012) and its influence in higher education (Brown & Carasso 2013) have led students to perceive themselves as consumers, and academic teachers as service providers. As noted by Lippmann, Bulanda and Wagenaar (2009, p.199), "university programming and infrastructure cater increasingly to the wishes and interests of students, including better and more interesting food choices, 24-hour fitness centres, expansive new residence halls with no shared bathrooms, on-campus writing and learning centres, and student unions that resemble resorts and shopping malls". This consumer orientation governs students' university experience, extending naturally to curriculum and course content, and to engagement with learning tasks and assessments. Students now understand themselves to be purchasing a ready-made experience (Barnett 2011; Furedi 2010) within an economic transactional model whereby student customers pay the tertiary institution to make an effort (Lippmann et al. 2009).

Compared to even a decade ago, students' expectations of learning and teaching at university are more influenced by information technology (Lippmann et al. 2009). With little effort from the user, online educational technology provides instant information and communication (Everhart 2009). At its most basic level of functionality, online technology caters for the consumer model of education whereby students download packaged educational materials, and online communication facilitates access to university staff; this is consistent with students' expectations of universities as service providers.

The consumer model of education departs from the concept of the agentic learner, in which responsibility for effort resides mostly with the student. Reeve and Tseng (2011, p.257) define "agentic engagement" as "students' constructive contribution into the flow of the instruction they receive". Agentic engagement is argued to be a fourth component of learning, along with behavioural, emotional and cognitive components (Reeve & Tseng 2011). Engagement relates to motivation and positively predicts course achievement (Reeve & Lee 2014). Throughout the relevant literature, agentic learning is considered preferable to the information-receiver alternative.

Students' constructive contribution as agentic learners is clearly at odds with the passive consumption that typifies traditional methods of tertiary education, and with the rudimentary application of online technology for transferring prepared materials to students. Perhaps surprisingly, traditional university teaching complements the new consumer model in that, traditionally, students were expected to consume information from lectures and slide presentations or by reading books and articles, all produced by academic instructors and other expert authors. Online delivery of lectures, slides and published content merely facilitates unidirectional information transfer. Information technology alone does not make learning agentic.

Traditional university teaching, in which students learn from extended monologues delivered in lectures or in print or online, is definitely incompatible with contemporary popular culture, for which a common currency is the brief, visually and aurally dynamic video clip. Popular culture through its social-media ally is increasingly participatory, and thus has the potential to counter passive consumer culture in education. The rise of self-published multimedia productions distributed through online channels such as YouTube challenges passive consumerism by empowering amateurs with limited resources to reach mass audiences with their own productions, which can often be quite sophisticated.

1

However, agentic engagement will not be cultivated by tertiary educators, in resigned deference to popular culture, producing and distributing their own MTV-genre content for students to download and view. Properly embracing popular culture in tertiary education (where popular culture might formerly have been regarded condescendingly as vulgar and intellectually vacuous) will promote creative opportunities and outlets for students, against the expanding notion of the student as passive consumer, and instead energising agentic learning.

Agentic learning has the student creating the content in a manner compatible with popular culture's turning consumers into producers. Participatory trends in popular culture coupled with online technology have potential to transform passive online consumer-learners into active, agentic online learners. Towards a goal of transformatory curriculum and pedagogy, this paper describes and evaluates a specially developed learning and teaching innovation enlisting popular culture to engage undergraduate students in agentic learning. The task had student volunteers scripting and producing their own music-video clips to convey educational messages for a unit of study, and the active appraisal of those productions by the student-producers' peers.

The project was inspired by literature showing that students who develop their own learning content acquire a sense of ownership over the information and how it is taught, as well as agency over its delivery (Quinlan 2014). Students producing their own educational video content is not new (EdTechTeacher Inc. 2016; Greene & Crespi 2012; Willmot, Bramhall & Radley 2012). The innovative aspect for this project was its deliberate incorporation of popular culture into the exercise through replicating locally televised singing contests. The talent-quest format for learning and content delivery was likely to appeal to university students, as the category was familiar to students and likely to hold their attention (Anikeeva et al. 2010).

The project aimed to convert educational consumers into ardent producers of educational multimedia content within a large, interprofessional health-science unit. Given the typically young age of undergraduate students, their characteristic passion for popular culture, electronic media and communication and the current selfie craze, we expected a high level of student engagement and positive appraisals of the project.

Methods

This intervention study employed a descriptive, exploratory cross-sectional design with a single group of participants. Volunteer students scripted and produced multimedia presentations featuring music, vocals or dramatisations, and with prescribed educational aims and content; this activity was the intervention. The multimedia film clip format was chosen for its familiarity and acceptance among young people. Over and above the vernacular nature of the medium, these productions would force students to grapple intellectually with the educational content in a manner consistent with agentic learning. Student evaluations of their experiences in developing and viewing the video presentations served as the post-intervention evaluation, as well as the measured outcome and a further agentic exercise for the student audience.

Unit of study: Communication in Health
The *Communication in Health* unit runs within an undergraduate health-science program for students at a large, metropolitan university in Australia. The unit develops written, oral and non-verbal communication skills to prepare health-science students across 10 allied health disciplines

2

for therapeutic or rehabilitation work with individual clients in clinical settings, educating community members about health and working with other health professionals in a multidisciplinary team. As a communication unit, the subject was wholly compatible with scripting and producing educational content. All students enrolled in the project were eligible to participate as content producers and as the audience who evaluated the video presentations and their experience of the project.

Project description: Communication Idol
The so-called *Communication Idol* project resembled well-known vocal-entertainment talent contests such as *Australian Idol* and *The Voice*. These broadcasts attract large viewing audiences on Australian commercial television. Students enrolled in the unit were invited to create an original music video or a parody with an educational theme for any one of five concepts taught in the unit: 1) verbal and non-verbal communication; 2) active listening; 3) the role of empathy in communication; 4) communicating with people from a variety of cultures; and 5) communicating in an interprofessional team. For each of the five concepts, as many as three groups of students, with a maximum of three students per group, could submit a video conforming to these guidelines: 1) describe the communication concept presented; 2) adhere to a maximum three minutes' duration; and 3) be entertaining.

All students enrolled in the unit were encouraged to rate the videos they had seen for their educational and entertainment value. Students further completed an online survey about their overall experiences with the project and its ability to promote active learning and engagement; in effect, the students evaluated the agentic properties of the task. This involvement benefitted agentic learning not only for the relative minority of students creating the content, but for all students through active participation similar to televised talent quests where winners are chosen by viewer polling, such as the *Eurovision Song Contest* (European Broadcasting Union, 2016). For a competitive element, and authentic to televised talent contests, winning videos in *Communication Idol* were chosen by the peer audience of other students in the unit and awarded cash prizes. The actual ballot resembled those used in *Australian Idol* and *The Voice*, in which viewers vote to retain their favourite performers in the race for the ultimate prize.

Student winners of the first prize, crowned *Communication Idols*, received AU$750 cash. The second placed team received $600 cash, third place received $450 cash and fourth place received $150 cash. Students who submitted a video but did not place in the top four received a $100 department store voucher for their effort and enthusiasm.

Students who participated fully by watching all videos and completing the evaluation survey received an extra five marks out of 100 toward their grade in the unit. The additional marks were planned to encourage participation and interaction with the videos and their evaluation, especially among the more instrumentally minded students for whom marks are the major incentive to action. The token extrinsic reward was not so large as to enlist genuinely unwilling students, as evidenced by the partial response rate described in the Results section. The project was funded by the university's competitive *Catalysing Innovation in Learning and Teaching Grant.* Ethical approval, including for the prizes and extra marks, was obtained from the university's human research ethics committee.

Recruitment of contestants
A short promotional video resembling those on television promoting *Australian Idol* was developed to encourage students to produce their own videos. Author and unit coordinator TD acted as host of the newly coined and fictitious *Communication Idol* contest, explaining the

contest, its rules, prizes and bonus marks and the need for volunteer contestants. To heighten the authenticity of the promotional video, chroma-key compositing replaced a green screen background with the *Australian Idol* stage. Further supporting the popular-culture aesthetic of the promotional video, author MK designed a *Communication Idol* logo based on the *Australian Idol* logo and sourced an open-access version of the *Australian Idol* music.

The promotional video was played at least twice to students enrolled in the unit between Weeks 2 and 6 of the 14-week teaching semester during tutorials and lectures as a "commercial break," and made available on the unit's online learning-management system (LMS). Students wishing to express interest in producing a video registered their team and nominated their preferred concept via an online form.

Fourteen students across seven teams registered as video-producer contestants (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Seven contestants were female and six male. All teams were interprofessional except for one group of three podiatry students. All individual students and teams who registered submitted a video. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the students' programs of study. Percentages sum to more than 100 because some students were enrolled in more than one program. A wide variety of programs are evident, with clinically oriented allied health predominating.

Table 1. Teams and concepts for *Communication Idol* productions

Team composition	Specialisations	Chosen concept for production
1 student	Traditional Chinese Medicine	Communicating in an interprofessional team
1 student	Physiotherapy	Verbal and non-verbal communication
1 student	Physiotherapy	The role of empathy in communication
2 students	Podiatry Health Science	Active listening
2 students	Paramedicine	Communicating with people from a variety of cultures
3 students	Physiotherapy Physiotherapy Podiatry	Active listening
3 students	Podiatry Podiatry Podiatry	The role of empathy in communication

Recruitment of voters
When the *Communication Idol* contestants had uploaded their completed videos to the unit's LMS site, students were advised via a mass email that they had one week to watch, evaluate and vote on the videos. Students were also advised of the steps required to secure the extra five marks on their final grade for the unit: 1) read the participant information sheet online, 2) watch and evaluate each video, 3) vote for their top three videos and 4) complete an online survey about the learning and teaching innovation.

Video delivery, evaluation and voting
Contestants were allowed from the time of their registration until two weeks after the completion of their final exam at the conclusion of the semester to submit their video as a computer file to author RF and to upload it as a *YouTube* link. Within the unit's LMS a folder housed the submitted *Communication Idol* videos and the evaluation and voting resources. These materials were presented to students using Adobe Captivate, a rapid-response authoring tool for creating e-learning content. Within Captivate, each video was displayed on a virtual iPad and prefaced by the

4

Communication Idol logo and music. To ensure that students watched all of each video before proceeding to video evaluation or voting, the video controls were disabled until the video finished playing. Students clicked a *Continue* button at the end of the video to record their subjective evaluation of what they had just watched. Using a five-point Likert scale measuring agreement, students evaluated each video on three criteria: 1) In the video it was very clear which concept was going to be presented and the information presented was accurate; 2) I felt that the level of creativity and innovation within the video was quite high; and 3) The video's production quality was very good and engaged its audience well.

When students had completed the evaluation for one video, they clicked a *Submit* button that brought up a code word and a text box where they could insert the code word before clicking *Submit* again and moving on to the next video. This necessary process enabled the researchers to track each student's engagement with each video. After having watched and evaluated all the videos, students were then asked to pick their top three favourites. Evaluations were recorded on Google Forms.

The Communication Idols: winning teams and videos
The votes received via Google Forms allowed for the calculation of first, second and third place. A narrow voting margin led to the unplanned fourth-place award for the team scoring below third. The first-place winner consisted of one female, a musically talented physiotherapy student who produced a high-quality parody of Adele's *Hello* for verbal and non-verbal communication. The second-placed team comprised three students (two female and one male; two physiotherapy and one podiatry) with their humorous parody of Taylor Swift's *Black Space* (which the team entitled *Blank Face)* for active listening. The third-placed team included one female paramedicine student and one male health-science student who recruited a cast of their peers to re-enact *Summer Lovin'* (from the 1978 romantic comedy musical film *Grease*) for communicating with people from a variety of cultures. In fourth place was a female physiotherapy student who created a comedy skit, titled the *Apathy Project*, about how health-care providers can manage empathy when interacting with clients or patients. Winning contributions, indeed all submitted videos, could reasonably be described as inventive, witty and remarkably well produced. The Appendix contains the video links.

Online survey for evaluating the project
Evaluation for the project as a whole (as opposed to voting for the competing videos) used predominantly quantitative methodology, with considerable allowance for qualitative data collection and thematic analysis.

Using closed- and open-ended questions, an online survey separate from the video-contest poll collected data about students' perceptions of the *Communication Idol* contest as an engaging learning tool, and of how the videos compared with other learning resources in the unit. This survey was administered via *SurveyMonkey* and included basic demographic and other questions, including: why students decided to become contestants or not; whether the videos were a fun and engaging way to learn and review key concepts within the unit; whether students valued the popular-culture premise of the contest; the benefits, if any, of student-developed teaching resources on learning and student engagement; the role of voting for winners as a means to control teaching content; the contest as a means to increase student satisfaction with the learning experience of the unit; and the transferability of this teaching innovation to other units. A set of 12 items consisting of statements referring to the above topics was devised. Students responded to these statements using five-point, single-response agreement-rating scales from left to right: *Strongly agree*, *Agree*, *Neutral*, *Disagree*, *Strongly disagree*. Invisibly to the student, the system

scored responses to these items from 5 to 1, with higher scores representing more agreement. A final item sought open-ended comments about the *Communication Idol* contest itself and, the associated videos, activity and learning processes; the responses to this item fed into qualitative analysis.

Data analysis
Sample characteristics were summarised descriptively. Numbers of students producing or not producing videos, and reasons for their decision to produce or not produce a video are presented in this section. The experience of producing a video was evaluated using closed responses from students who did produce a video. Students' experience of teaching and learning from the video component of the unit, whether or not the student produced a video, is presented using continuous variable summary statistics (means, medians etc.) along with percentages of agreement for the 12 questionnaire statements about *Communicate Idol*.

Student ratings of their experience overall were compared for those who produced a video and those who did not, using a Mann-Whitney test effectively comparing medians; this non-parametric test was employed because of a large disparity in group sizes. The internal consistency of the 12 learning and teaching items was examined using reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) and principal axis factor analysis exploring the homogeneity of items and identifying any items with ratings unrelated to those from other items.

Responses to open-ended questions were typed and analysed thematically in accordance with Flick (2014). Emergent and substantive categories within participants' statements were identified in relation to the study's objectives. Analysis focused on topical responses and coding particularly for word repetition, direct and emotional statements, as well as discourse markers including intensifiers, connectives and evaluative clauses. Coding was done independently by authors RF and TD, who then discussed their coding before reaching a consensus on the final themes.

Results

Sample characteristics
Surveys were returned by 299 out of 569 students, a response rate of 54.5%. The mean age of student participants was 22 years, whilst 19 years (n = 85 students aged 19 years, 28% of the sample) was both the most common and the median age. Eighty percent of students returning surveys were aged under 24 years, with 7% aged over 30. Sixty-three percent identified as *woman*, with the remaining 37% identifying as *man*. Ninety-three percent were in their first year of study, with the others fairly evenly distributed across the second, third and fourth years. Thus the sample was predominantly young and in their early years of undergraduate study, with the majority female.

Eleven (79%) of the 13 students submitting a video were aged 21 years or under, and eight (57%) were female, which, in percentage terms, roughly corresponded to the age and gender profile of the sample (72% aged 21 or under; 63% female, N = 299).

Error! Reference source not found. shows the programs of study for all respondents and the subset of students producing videos, with multiple responses allowed. A wide variety of programs was evident, with physiotherapy and podiatry students featuring strongly among students producing videos.

6

Table 2. Programs of study

	All respondents N = 299	Students producing videos N = 14
Program		
Occupational therapy	21%	7%
Paramedicine	17%	7%
Physiotherapy	17%	29%
Podiatry	15%	36%
Therapeutic recreation	10%	7%
Health promotion	9%	14%
Health and physical education	8%	0%
Health-services management	6%	0%
Health science	5%	7%
Sport and exercise	2%	0%
Traditional Chinese medicine	2%	7%
Other	3%	0%

Reasons for producing or not producing a video

Of those submitting a video, 64% were externally motivated by wanting to win a prize, 79% liked the idea of students developing content, 50% considered the unit and its content relevant to health, 50% liked projects with an intellectual component, 29% were encouraged by peers and 14% gave other responses, with multiple responses allowed. Multiple reasons were also allowed for the 284 students not producing a video: 81% did not have time, 16% did not feel confident, 12% stated that "no one wanted to do it with me", 7% did not want a shopping voucher, 4% considered working with other students as too difficult and 8% gave other reasons.

Evaluating the process of video production

When asked to evaluate the *Communication Idol* development process by selecting multiple-response items from a list, the 13 students who produced a video agreed that the process "was fun" (86%), they were "able to learn a lot" (64%) and the process was "more work than anticipated" (29%), whilst 14% selected "other" reasons. The support provided by the staff unit coordinator and research assistant during the development process was rated as "very good" (57%), "good" (36%) and "neutral" (7%), with no lower ratings.

Evaluating the learning and teaching experience

Error! Reference source not found. shows descriptive statistics for the 12 learning and teaching experience items. For any item the maximum score was 5 (*Strongly agree*) and the minimum 1 (*Strongly disagree*). Average ratings tended towards agreement with each item; yet there was noteworthy variation in the percentage of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with each item. The strongest agreement occurred for participating in the questionnaire and voting so as to receive extra marks. Rating-scale items suggested generally that the exercise of video production and learning from this effort was viewed favourably by the sample as a whole.

Table 3. Rating-scale responses

Learning and teaching items	*M*	*SD*	*Mdn*	Mode	% Mode	% Agree or Strongly Agree	Valid N
The videos were a fun and engaging way to learn or review key concepts within the unit.	4.05	0.79	4	4	5%		295
I enjoyed engaging in the videos because the concept and contest were based on popular media (i.e., Australian Idol).	3.58	1.00	4	4	4%		296
Having other students produce the learning content supported the content delivered by the lecturer(s) and tutor(s).	3.98	0.84	4	4	5%		294
The videos helped me to learn more than other learning activities within the unit.	3.44	1.03	3	3	3%		295
The fact that the students were from various disciplines allowed me to see how the concepts were relevant to many health disciplines including my own.	3.68	0.96	4	4	4%		293
The *Communication Idol* contest was a good way to engage students to teach one another.	4.07	0.84	4	4	5%		292
Voting for the videos that I liked made me feel I had control over the content available to future students.	3.71	0.96	4	4	4%		292
When students have control over the content delivered in a unit it is more meaningful to them.	4.10	0.78	4	4	4%		293
This type of teaching and learning innovation should be used in other units.	3.78	0.99	4	4	4%		291
Doing this activity made me enjoy the unit more than if I hadn't done it.	3.53	1.03	4	3	3%		296
I participated in voting and this questionnaire to get extra marks in this unit.	4.27	0.80	4	5	4%		293
I participated in watching the videos and voting on them to review, consolidate and test my knowledge in this unit.	3.68	1.08	4	4	3%		295

A Mann-Whitney test found the students who produced video content scored significantly higher on ratings averaged across valid responses for all 12 statements compared with students who did not produce a video ($p = .0077$). Students producing videos averaged 4.28 ($SD = 0.51$, *Mdn* = 4.25, n = 14), which is well into the agreement zone of the rating scale. Students who did not produce a video averaged 3.80 ($SD = 0.65$, *Mdn* = 3.88, n = 282), just below agreement on the rating scale.

From the statement wordings in **Error! Reference source not found.**, the only item not describing learning and teaching positively is the second-last, referring to participating and voting to get extra marks. The exceptional meaning of this item was also demonstrated empirically, via reliability and factor analysis. Reliability analysis for the rating-scale items gave a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 indicating high internal consistency. The average inter-item correlation was a moderate .44, suggesting that the items were related, but not excessively redundant. Correlations between each item and the scale total averaged a high .62, whereas the item about voting and filling in the questionnaire for marks correlated only a low .12 with the total score for the scale. This same item was the only statement contributing negatively to Cronbach's alpha, so that removing the item increased alpha for the remaining items to 0.91. Along similar lines, principal-axis factor analysis yielded a single factor accounting for 46% of the shared variance. This factor is plausibly interpreted as a general measure of satisfaction with the teaching, learning and process

8

aspects of the initiative. Factor loadings onto this satisfaction factor averaged a high .66 for all 12 items, but only .13 for voting and completing the questionnaire for marks, much lower than for the other 11 items. These analyses show that all but one of rating-scale items constituted a homogenous set that was conceptually and empirically coherent in the ratings of agreement. The single odd item did not appraise educational aspects and process; instead, it addressed external motivation for participating in the evaluation, which the responses reflect.

Qualitative findings

Emergent themes were related to *Communication Idol*'s catalysing and engaging students in learning; the developmental value of producing a video; staff support for students making a video; and how the learning activity could have been improved.

Respondents valued *Communication Idol* as a means to catalyse learning and improve understanding of and engagement with unit content. The videos were described as "understandable and engaging" (Female, 21 years, physiotherapy) and offering "valuable insight" (Male, 18 years, sports and exercise science).

Students could reflect on their learning and identify key characteristics of communicating health concepts:

> *I was able to learn a lot about the importance of empathy within communication in*
> *health care setting and the distinct differences between empathy and sympathy.*
> (Male, 21 years, sports and exercise science)

Learning through watching or making a video was an "innovative" (male, 17 years, occupational therapy) way to consolidate learning. The videos enabled students to feel more competent about communicating health concepts. One paramedicine student wrote:

> *All of the video[s were] wonderful, they helped me learn more and made me remember*
> *more clearly about what is communication.* (Female, 18 years)

A physiotherapy student noted that the learning activity showed how interprofessional teams can function, and the value of this demonstration before entering the workforce.

> *It was great to see all disciplinary teams working together and was an awesome way*
> *to get some extra practice on communication styles before entering the real world.*
> (Female, 26 years)

Learning through audio-visual engagement was also perceived to be a "fun" (male, 19 years, podiatric medicine) and enjoyable way to engage with the content. Two physiotherapy students wrote:

> *It may have helped people understand the content better. I learnt so much but in a*
> *fun way.* (Female, 26 years)

> *This way especially with meaningful movies and songs incorporated into learning is*
> *extremely effective.* (Male, 19 years)

Students who made videos indicated that doing so encouraged a deeper understanding of the communication of health concepts and their relevance in real life:

> *Compiling this video encouraged me to develop a new level of understanding of different concepts.* (Male, 22 years, occupational therapy)

> *By developing the video, I felt as if the engagement with the learning material led to a deeper understanding of the theory and how the application looked like in real life.* (Male, 21 years, physiotherapy)

Students who made a video felt that doing so increased opportunities for "collaboration" (Female, 20 years, physiotherapy):

> *It is a great bonding process for the teams and the whole unit. It provides more opportunities to study together later because of the rapport it creates. Great idea.* (Female, 28 years, traditional Chinese medicine)

For student contestants, developing a video encouraged the "refinement" of their skills (Male, 28 years, podiatric medicine) and provided an opportunity for creativity. An occupational therapy student stated, "We got to use our unique thoughts and ideas to show our peers the benefits of effective communication" (Male, 32 years).

A therapeutic recreation student who developed a video indicated that doing so helped her develop confidence in many life areas: "I received a lot of confidence in communication in day to day life and it will help in my future profession" (Female, 26 years). This self-assurance did not go unnoticed by the students who watched and voted on the videos: "I admire the courage and effort that went into creating and presenting them" (Female, 17 years, therapeutic recreation).

To ensure equity across teams in the technical aspects of video production, the first and second authors offered support to the student contestants. Consistent with the quantitative results, qualitative data indicated satisfaction with the quality and availability of support:

> *RF and TD made sure to offer lots of support with the whole development process from the beginning to end and were always willing to take on suggestions and requests.* (Male, 22 years, therapeutic recreation)

> *They were very helpful by offering assistance in regards to video production and lyric proofreading.* (Female, 22 years, occupational therapy)

One paramedicine student indicated that more resources could have been provided to improve the student experience: "I think it would be beneficial for this initiative if students were given access to better resources (camera, setting, microphones) to enhance the experience" (Female, 27 years).

Students' suggestions for improvement related to voting time: "Needs to have a longer voting period. Expecting people to vote within 48 hours when not all of us check our student emails after exams is a bit unrealistic" (Male, 22 years, therapeutic recreation).

Whilst most students were highly satisfied with the learning activity, some indicated that releasing the videos before the exam would have been more beneficial:

> *I would suggest this kind of thing be used in other units to engage students in ways not traditionally used, but it should occur before the exam period so a student can*

10

use the videos as study tools where relevant. Overall I think it's a great initiative.
(Male, 27 years, physiotherapy)

Other suggestions for improvement included the visual and audio quality of the videos:

Students should try submitting videos without the sound being muffled so it could be more clear and understandable. (Female, 18 years, occupational therapy)

In the future, if possible the sound quality needs to be improved so that all voters can understand/ hear the stories. (Female, 23 years, podiatric medicine)

Comments about other technical aspects included how the videos were presented on the unit LMS site, which may have caused confusion: "The final voting was a bit confusing, as I forgot which video was which. Having better titles to distinguish between then would be a good idea" (Male, 17 years, traditional Chinese medicine).

Discussion

This study implemented and evaluated a specially developed learning and teaching innovation, *Communication Idol*, capitalising on popular culture to engage an interprofessional cohort of undergraduate allied health science students in active learning. Despite external incentives and perceived intrinsic motivators, only a small minority of students elected to produce a video, whilst just over one-half chose to participate in the formal evaluation. The partial level of engagement may reflect practical barriers such as the perceived difficulty of the task, limited time and lack of student acquaintances with whom to form a team. From the students' perspective these barriers would be genuine. They must be acknowledged and, to the extent possible, overcome with support from educators seeking to involve students in creative activity beyond attending classes and completing ordinary assignments.

The remaining students, almost one-half of the unit's enrolment, confined themselves to evaluation or non-participation, despite a small, external incentive of several marks towards their grade. Beyond the practical barriers to full participation in the form of producing a video, the dominant preference for consuming educational content produced by their peers aligns with a contemporary perceived role as customers within a consumerised university system (Barnett 2011; Furedi 2010). This preference may represent a perceived right among university students to consume information but without responsibility for active engagement in learning (Williams 2011). If so, then the *Communication Idol* project was only partly successful in transforming students from passive consumers to agentic learners through active production and evaluation. Agentic learning is essentially more demanding of the student than passive consumption; the production of a video clip worth showing is no small challenge, which may explain why so many students opted for the minor role of evaluation. Evaluation required a time commitment in return for only five marks, which may explain why so many students opted out altogether.

The students who produced a video generally appraised the process favourably, and more favourably than those who did not, even when some students perceived the task as more demanding than expected. As noted by Armstrong, Tucker and Massad (2009), students who engaged in the development of podcasts to present on business communication fundamentals found the experience to be enriching and irreplaceable. In the current study even vicarious

11

involvement – viewing other students' productions – was nevertheless appraised as enjoyable and beneficial among students who participated. More-active involvement, though effortful, was perceived as even more rewarding.

A major difference between *Communication Idol* and Armstrong et al.'s study was how the development of podcasts constituted part of the curriculum, was learning objective-driven and contributed to students' formal assessment, whereas *Communication Idol* served as an optional adjunct to a complete unit. Assuming that practical barriers could be overcome, integrating learning experiences such as *Communication Idol* into compulsory learning tasks and formal assessments would garner more active engagement simply by requirement. Students who made videos for *Communication Idol* found more value in making them compared to the students who only watched them. Students who feel content as spectators without attempting a more active role may need external prompting, so that retrospectively they discover the rewards of active, rather than passive, learning. However, coerced engagement under a regime of prescribed assessment criteria could militate against intrinsic enthusiasm, creativity and initiative, which is a matter for consideration. Realistically, not all health-science students will have the time, skills and confidence to produce audio-visual content to a standard the students would feel willing to share, which militates against a project such as *Communication Idol* becoming compulsory in a health-science unit.

As the survey listed different reasons for producing a video compared with not producing a video, the responses from video producers to these items are not strictly comparable to those from non-producers. The extrinsic reward of the shopping voucher was reportedly a key motivator to produce a video, whilst students not producing a video mostly attributed their non-production to the aforementioned practical and social barriers rather than to not wanting the shopping voucher. For the students who produced a video, the monetary prize was a strong motivator, but not their only reason. For most students not producing a video, the external reward of a shopping voucher could not overcome perceived hindrances within task and process, lack of confidence and the too-often solitary nature of undergraduate study. The message for educators is that students are easily discouraged from developing creative content by the daunting prospect of production under time and resource constraints, and of assembling a viable team. As indicated by Olson, Bidewell, Dune and Lessey (2016) either the perception or the reality of social isolation must be addressed to encourage university students into creative teamwork with their student colleagues.

With the exception of one of the 12 items, the rating-scale evaluation tool appears to measure satisfaction with the concept and process of students producing audio-visual learning materials for their peers. This scale could be used in future evaluations of similar projects, with the possible omission of the external-motivation item when combining scores across items.

Limitations

The study's limitations hold lessons for educators researching ways to enhance engagement using student-authored learning content. To ensure that students who watched the videos, voted and completed the survey received the extra marks owed to them, the survey asked for their student number. Recording of student numbers may have imposed demand characteristics through lack of anonymity, which may have deterred students from participating, or encouraged responses biased towards perceived desirability.

12

The survey mostly examined satisfaction with the video-development process and the videos themselves rather than any benefits for achieving prescribed learning outcomes for the unit. This restriction in scope raises the importance of promoting to students the necessary connection between learning activities and learning objectives. Highlighting that active engagement in learning activities will improve their learning outcomes and grade can only reinforce the relevance of learning activities expected from students.

The video productions were especially appropriate for the content of the unit (communication skills in a health context). Doubtless there are limits to the concepts and skills that can be taught this way, with no implication that multimedia productions by students should altogether replace more traditional content delivery or turn education into vaudeville, which the current project categorically did not. Underscoring every video production was a sense of mature responsibility, and fidelity towards the educational objective.

All educational methods must be selected judiciously and applied with intellectual discipline, which happened with *Communication Idol*. Although similar techniques have been used in varied contexts from business (Armstrong et al. 2009) to research methods (Anderson 2013), astronomy and physics (Sanders, Faesi & Goodman 2014), this paper does not suggest competitive production of instructional materials in popular format as a universal approach; rather, it can be a potent strategy for inspiring students to active learning where the medium complements the content.

The non-experimental design of the project, without comparative conditions, proved suitable for the planned purpose of retrospective appraisal of students' experiences. Evaluating similar innovations' effects on specific learning outcomes would require a controlled trial comparing assessment results ideally for three groups: students producing and viewing content, students only viewing content and a control condition where no student-authored content is produced or viewed.

Conclusion

Results demonstrate that the student audience perceived the learning and teaching aspects of the instructional music videos created by students through the *Communication Idol* project as enjoyable and educationally worthwhile. This finding is important and encouraging for educators considering this type of initiative, as the project was designed essentially for its educational value. Key learnings include the importance of linking such activities to learning objectives and integrating active learning into assessment structures. Overall, this research indicates that incorporating popular culture in learning tasks, ceding a degree of participation to students and bringing their wider experience to the classroom can catalyse students to become active, agentic learners, mobilising them beyond expectant consumption of the academic experience.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest to report.

13

References

Anderson, J 2013. Evaluating student-generated film as a learning tool for qualitative methods: Geographical "drifts" and the city. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 37(1), pp. 136-146. doi:10.1080/03098265.2012.694070.

Anikeeva, O, Bi, P, Hiller, J E, Ryan, P, Roder, D & Han, G S 2010. The health status of migrants in Australia: a review. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health,* 22(2), pp. 159-193. doi:10.1177/1010539509358193.

Armstrong, G R, Tucker, J M & Massad, V J 2009. Achieving learning goals with student-created podcasts. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education,* 7(1), pp. 149-154. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4609.2008.00209.x.

Barnett, R 2011. The marketised university: Defending the indefensible. In Molesworth, M, Scullion, R & Nixon, E (eds.), *The marketisation of higher education and the student as consumer.*. Routledge, Abingdon, UK, pp. 39-51.

Brown, R & Carasso, H 2013. *Everything for sale? The marketisation of UK higher education.* Routledge, Abingdon, UK.

Edmundson, M 1997. On the uses of a liberal education. *Harper's Magazine, 295*, 39-49.

EdTechTeacher Inc. 2016. Video in the classroom. Retrieved from http://edtechteacher.org/tools/multimedia/video-classroom/.

European Broadcasting Union 2016. Eurovision Song Contest. Retrieved from http://www.eurovision.tv.

Everhart, J 2009. You-Tube in the science classroom. *Science & Children,* 46(9), pp. 32-35.

Flick, A 2014. Can assessment loops be closed? *Progress, Trends and Practices in Higher Education,* 26(4).

Furedi, F 2010. Introduction to the marketisation of higher education and the student as consumer. In Molesworth, M, Scullion, R & Nixon, E (eds.), *The marketisation of higher education and the student as consumer.* Routledge, Abingdon, UK, pp. 1-8.

Greene, H & Crespi, C 2012. The value of student created videos in the college classroom – An exploratory study in marketing and accounting. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences,* 5(1), pp. 273-283.

Lippmann, S, Bulanda, R E & Wagenaar, T C 2009. Student entitlement: Issues and strategies for confronting entitlement in the classroom and beyond. *College Teaching,* 57(4), pp. 197-204. doi:10.1080/87567550903218596.

Olson, R, Bidewell, J, Dune, T & Lessey, N 2016. Developing Cultural Competence through Self-Reflection in Interprofessional Education in Australia. *Journal of Interprofessional Care,* 30(3), pp. 347-354.

14

Quinlan, K M 2014. Leadership of teaching for student learning in higher education: what is needed? *Higher Education Research & Development,* 33(1), pp. 32-45.

Reeve, J & Lee, W 2014. Students' classroom engagement produces longitudinal changes in classroom motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 106(2), pp. 527-540. doi:10.1037/a0034934.

Reeve, J & Tseng, C M 2011. Agency as a fourth aspect of students' engagement during learning activities. *Contemporary Educational Psychology,* 36(4), pp. 257-267. doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2011.05.002.

Sandel, M J 2012. *What money can't buy: the moral limits of markets*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York.

Sanders, N, Faesi, C & Goodman, A 2014. A new approach to developing interactive software modules through graduate education. *Journal of Science Education & Technology,* 23(3), pp. 431-440. doi:10.1007/s10956-013-9474-4.

Williams, J 2011. Constructing consumption: what media representations reveal about today's students. In Molesworth, M, Scullion, R & Nixon, E (eds.), *The marketisation of higher education and the student as consumer.* Routledge, Abingdon, UK, pp. 170-182.

Willmot, P, Bramhall, M & Radley, K 2012. Using digital video reporting to inspire and enage students. Retrieved from http://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/other/using-digital-video-reporting.

15

Appendix 1: Videos Produced By *Communication Idol* Contest Winners

- First Place: Emily Johnson – *"Hello" (Adele Parody) for verbal and non-verbal communication*.
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QyT6GZHmTY0&feature=youtu.be

- Second Place: Sharon Ling, Wei Zhuang & Lily Nguyen – *"Blank Face" (Taylor Swift parody) for active listening*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXXSUXzv-Aw&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=SharonChen

- Third Place: Natalie Jones & Peter Carroll – *"Summer Lovin'" (Grease parody) for Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication*.
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sytqifeQRdE&app=desktop

- Fourth Place: Viana Ho – "*The Apathy Project" for the role of empathy in communication*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkWgN5cBR-w&feature=youtu.be

16