

Flip Camera 'Boundaries' Case Study – Student-Led Innovation

On 22nd May 2012, PoP5 students Alex Blomley, Ellie Camm, and Alexia Reader told me how they had used one of the School's Flip Cameras to help them document their PoP5 studio-based project.

Tell me about how you came to use the flip camera.

The module that we've used the camera for is called PoP5 – it stands for Processes of Performance. We could either do a performance or a presentation at the end of the module to show our process. We thought that using a camera would be a really unique way to show that.

So, tell me about your project.

Our project was called Boundaries; it was about finding personal boundaries and ways we could break them through performance in order to develop a new method for performer training looking at risk taking and that sort of thing. We did a set of experiments which we filmed and documented in the making to really engage with the process

I think the crux of our project was all about that moment when you take a risk for the first time. The various things we did, it was like an 'of the moment' thing, and it was really important that that was captured and portrayed. Because as soon as you've rehearsed something and done it once or twice, it doesn't become a risk any more. You're constantly extending the boundary

I think on one day when we were doing a lot of risk taking with blindfolds, we – as the day progressed – realised that, at the beginning we were talking about things at the camera and then we'd go *oh, we should have filmed something like this*, and we'd then film it, but having already discussed something. So we've missed the original thoughts. I edited the film together for our final piece and could see in each of the different films that we did throughout the day how it went from going *oh, we've just done this and we're going to film it*, to actually filming just the room.

You never know when you're going to have one of those *moments*, those threshold moments where you have a breakthrough. You never know when that's going to be, it's always nice to know that that was captured so you can watch it back and really understand it.

That's what was really good about the camera as well; it was so easy if you wanted to see something back straight away just to plug it into the computer and watch.

It's very simple to use, which is for me, I'm an absolute idiot when it comes to technology, I wouldn't have a clue, so for me having something that was so deadly simple – point and press – is fantastic

OK, so when you were devising you were trying to find those felt moments in the actual doing of it...So the aim was to get that, to actually capture that moment...Almost unrepeatably sort of moment

Exactly. I think that was the main thing to remember was that these moments that we captured - their validity was lost if they were performed again.

So when it came to the presentation, we had those exact moments to show. It was really nice to be able to not have to repeat something, or try and explain it. We could just show 'this is that moment'. And have it on film.

So you recorded those moments, and then you said it was really easy if you needed to watch something back. So how did you then use the footage?

We had a 20 minute(ish) presentation and we showed two films ...

... one of the experiments we did was a fast, we did a two day fast to see how that would affect us in terms of performance. So we filmed the control test, day one, day two, the day we had to prepare for it (we were eating fruit and vegetables). We showed just a [tiny clip of Lex](#) saying how she felt about being hungry and a tiny a bit of a monologue she read, which was about hunger and how she felt about reading it just to give them an idea.

The crux of our project we discovered was this blindfold experiment we did, in the end. That was something we felt was a massive breakthrough for us, and so then we showed another edited film which is about a minute and a half long of the process of blindfold (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQJGzRMfxuc>). So we started by running across a room blindfolded, and then as we got better at it we decided to run at one another and had to stop toe to toe which we got wrong many times but finally managed to do. And then we've got *OK, let's add an obstacle course into there*. So it's showing all of the thought process behind it. And then we handed in a supporting document which was a 25 minute film of everything that we've done but edited quite heavily, showing the process and how the ideas had grown from each experiment.

As well as the assessment aspect of it, it was also really nice having the film there throughout the process because we could watch stuff that we'd just done and learn from it. You could say *oh, actually, the reason we didn't do that, you could see there that I did this or you did this*, and by watching it back we can see ourselves and our own mistakes or achievements.

So part of a feedback loop

Yeah, it was actually.

OK. So did you find you were using it in that way quite a bit in the devising process?

Yeah – I think it's almost like we've just done something, let's have a look at it, you know, it's sort of a little bit indulgent and you just want to watch it back. But I think subconsciously you probably are learning and improving but without really realising it.

For instance, there was one where Alex fell off a chair. Although we wanted to watch it because *oh, that will be funny to watch*, in doing so, we saw that that was because Alex needed to take an extra step. It was like we could kind of learn *oh, well then the step we need to take needs to be smaller* so you don't sit on the edge of the chair, you actually sit on the chair. So although it was funny to

"it was also really nice having the film there throughout the process because we could watch stuff that we'd just done and learn from it"

watch Alex fall off a chair, it actually helped us learn what to do in terms of movement. There was another thing where we were both lifting Lex and there was kind of a pivot where I had to go 90 degrees and then walk straight and place her on a different chair. We'd done it with our eyes open and I thought I knew what felt like 90 degrees. But with your blindfold it feels completely different, and I went further and then she wasn't on the chair. So watching that back I learned, OK, well then I know that I need to dimension it slightly in my mind, and what feels less is actually probably right. So you do learn so much just from watching.

I think we would probably watch something if there was one of these funny moments, but it was a funny moment because we'd made a mistake. And often I think I probably just watched it because it was funny, and thought nothing of it but I think probably there was a lot to learn from it.

From your description there it sounds like it's sort of added to your perception of information - by watching it, that then goes in, you're processing, you're thinking I need to adjust my body

Yeah - especially considering we were working with blindfolds, so essentially the camera was our eyes, because we couldn't see what we were doing at the time.

There was no-one watching around us so we had to just rely on where we placed the camera. There's quite an interesting shot where we walk completely out of shot and we couldn't see it. So we got someone to come in and film, so we saw it from every angle which was really handy.

That was probably the only obstacle we came across was putting the camera in a particular place where it could capture everything, because we were working in quite a large studio space.

So you were thinking about your presentation, you were thinking about how to edit the footage, tell me about that process

That's entirely Ellie's hard work.

We talked about it a fair amount, about how to edit it together. We sat together watching it and trying to pick out clips ... of whether someone said something which was relevant ... and in the end I was then doing it myself. I just thought *Oh, there's so much, we need to condense it massively*, and I ended up just watching every single bit of film about three times and then picking out bits. I have a MAC, so I used very simple iMovie, so it wasn't by any means technologically advanced. You just had to pick up parts which seemed to show a learning process as such. There was one part at the end of this whole experiment where Alex was talking about what we'd done wrong, and I thought that was really good, and handy to have what you've done wrong on the film because that's how you learn, you learn from doing things wrong. So we said *oh, I think we focused far too much on the scientific side of the experiment instead of actually just thinking about how to make the environments more real*, and so I put that in. Then in the next experiment I put in any sort of reflection we had. We tend to do a lot of reflective chats, and at the time, you don't really think, *oh that's really good*, but then watching it back you think *that's absolute gold what you just said*. There's one thing that really motivated our process - without even realising that we'd said it - was *oh, if we could have just done it further,*

"at the time, you don't really think, oh that's really good, but then watching it back you think that's absolute gold what you just said..."

if we hadn't been restricted. And that was a big thing for us is that we felt that risk can't be controlled or restricted, because then it doesn't feel like risk. So it was a piece of absolute gold, and it was really interesting to watch it back and then pick out the perfect moments.

I think we all knew what we were being assessed on, you know, the module is all about the process ... that's where people often fall down, is because they focus so much on doing a polished performance without actually realising that the assessment is on the training process you've gone through. So with all that in mind, I think, you knew what to look out for in the end.

For our fasting experiment, we did each a different monologue to talk about how it affected us afterwards and it would have been a fatal error to make if I'd just put in us doing our monologues, because you're just reading about how hungry you are, it's not showing anything. So we put in just a tiny clip of us doing a monologue just to give a bit of context and then the reflection afterwards was what was really key. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIKKe7Lhxs>

That's interesting. So in that process of editing it, for one thing you've pulled out kind of insights that you might not have seen? Kind of discussions where you thought, hang on, that was really interesting, and that was in the process of watching it again?

Yeah. I think it's only actually this conversation that's made me realise how important this camera was. Like, it was really vital.

It would be strange to think of doing another project even if it wasn't Processes of Performance, any project without filming it.

It's been so insightful in how much it can help. I can't imagine being able to do a project quite so rigorously and doing it to the best ability without having some sort of visual documentation.

Especially if you're doing a performance. We didn't use cameras in our performance project, but I wish we did, because you could have watched back your own performances in rehearsals and seen *oh actually I don't like the way I do that...* although film doesn't capture the atmosphere or whatever, you can see how you're performing...it's good for reflection.

One thing that was quite haunting watching the film over and over again is you realise how many things about yourself are annoying.

Something I touch upon in my write-up was something from Jonathan's field - the original exploratory laboratory practices around the turn of the century were always being misinterpreted. Largely because it was just documented with journal documentation and diaries and things, and it was open to a lot of subjectivity and misinterpretation. So I think the camera frames things concretely... I mean, this is what we did, you can see what we did, it's not like, *oh we walked around the space five times and then we sat down...*

"the camera frames things concretely... I mean, this is what we did, you can see what we did"

... it removes an element of confusion

... yeah, exactly

The other thing you were saying about editing was looking for process – so in that, you were actually looking what is process, what is product

I had to, in the film, there's about ten clips all the same of running, and no, and running, and no, but then hearing the second one's voice going 'eyes closed' or 'Lex, close your eyes', 'Alex, open yours', stuff like that. So that you could see Oh, OK, they're adding elements in and they are getting better at it, coz they're stopping like a meter apart, and then getting closer, and then being able to put their arms in the right place, and then ... so you had to be able to show how it was improving and then you also had to put the product in I think to show the whole scheme of the process, otherwise if I hadn't put in them doing it completely right with blindfolds it would just have been a bit ...

... as if we didn't get anywhere

I think in a way the product is integral to the process, it's the end of it, isn't it

I think even the final thing wasn't really a product though - our final thing was that moment where we just worked out that we could just do it, and it wasn't polished. I remember that having the camera running rather than turning it off and on was great because ... one time, I think it was Alex was just supposed to have his eyes closed, and I was supposed to have mine open ... but I actually, I didn't, and I kept my eyes closed, and we did it both of us eyes closed at the same time (without realising) for the first time without planning to do that.

So that was a brilliant moment, I think, because you just realised, oh yeah, we can do it, and we hadn't intended to. It was a complete chance

...it was a spontaneous moment , which luckily was captured on film

You've got the issue of ... if you leave the camera on and you've got an hour's worth of footage which you need to condense to five ...

... you can always record the time when something happened ... just have a look at your watch when something good's just happened and make a note of it, then you know where to look in the film

And how did you incorporate that in the presentation?

We had two films in our presentation and as they were playing we would sort of just narrate as we were going along. So rather than that whole sort of arduous process of trying to describe these things which is obviously really hard for anyone who doesn't who hasn't been in our workshops.

So basically something that would take five minutes to explain in an articulate way was just shown instantly by the visual image, so you don't have to paint the picture with words, you can just have it there.

I think it was more impacting like that as well

Definitely. Well, for one it made people actually believe that it happened. Because it was there.

A big part of it is because we were doing things like fasting for two days and not sleeping, and then doing blindfolds, it could have been very easy for us to say, oh, we've done this and just kind of take our word for it. But with such extreme things, people would be like, well, anyone can say I did an obstacle course blindfolded, why should we believe you. It was really good for us to be like well, it's *there*, we did it, *play*.

I think that's really important as well, especially for PoP 5, because there isn't a lot of contact hours in the school, it's not a taught module

We had meetings with our tutor where we'd talk about what we've been doing, but yeah we'd just discuss, so they had no idea, for all they knew, we could have just been doing nothing the whole time, and we really felt it was important ... and we wanted to share it

Most of the other groups were applied, so they were all going out to hospitals and prisons, doing really great stuff for the community which then they could obviously show because they got the final stuff they'd done with all the people they'd worked with. But we were one of the only studio groups so we've really had to find different ways to *show* what we've done

There's something in having the film as well which – for some reason, where there's a film, people watch it, and it's really a kind of obvious thing to say but in a presentation when you're hearing a load of academic language you kind of zone out, so a film, you watch it

There was a lot of theory in our presentation, it was good to be able to say, well, this is why I've done it, but that's all irrelevant unless you can show *how* it's affected us.

You obviously have footage of your devising process, and then you went through a process of thinking about what research do we need to do, what would we need to put in the presentation, did your – effectively the archive footage of your devising process – was that something you went back to as part of that making sense and contextualising?

Definitely, because I think watching it back we could see 'oh, actually when we did *this*, this is actually quite similar to how this practitioner works, and actually this lends itself to this', or even earlier in the process when we were looking back on films when we looked into some of the stuff we did, you'd watch it and you'd suddenly think – not even for the presentation – you'd think actually, we could research that

OK. So if you're thinking of it as a research process, effectively you had your primary data there, your videoed process, and you're bringing secondary data as a lens to it?

Yeah, we were constantly analysing what we'd done, you liken it to the primary data, that was the nuts and bolts of what we did and that was what we were analysing.

And it's so difficult to go back in your mind if you haven't got a film. It's difficult to *think* back... I mean, people have done log books and things like that in the past and it's quite similar but ... I think you access the reality of where you were in your thought processes a lot easier from watching the film.

I've done log books in the past and personally they're a faff to write, I don't like writing ...

... it would always be the bane of everyone's life to keep a journal

...And you'd find everyone the night before handing in just making it up – maybe two or three people in the year would do it properly, and then the rest of us are going right, I've got twelve hours to finish this

But then again, maybe the people who were religiously keeping a journal – surely they would have spent that whole time writing rather than actually taking part in a real process – whereas a camera, you can just press play and then just do whatever you want to do and that's the beauty of it I think is that it's no effort to record

Yeah ... and I think if there'd been times in other modules where you'd had a film of the whole thing ... that say every session was filmed and then everybody got a copy of the film – I mean, it would be huge, that's the problem, if you wanted to film everything it would be huge

If there was any feedback I would give to PCI it would be to advocate that this is available. I think it should be something that the School really pushes forward for students in future modules as an option, almost as either you can write a journal or you can keep a video diary

I don't think people should take film documentation as an easy way out either, because although some people don't find it a hassle to write down their reflection, it is a hassle I find because there are things I want to say, my writing comes out scribbled, it's not easy to present it well. But then neither is doing this, by no means is it an easy way out, because – although I thoroughly enjoyed this, a lot more than I ever enjoyed writing down a diary, it's no means because I find it easier. It's just because I think it I think it's much better for reflecting on. But people can't think *oh, I'll just take a film*, because then there's the editing process. I've got about 15 USB's now because there's so many films - so it's not an easy process, but I think it's more worthwhile being able to reflect on it by watching as opposed to trying to remember, because you do forget a lot. This way you *have* it, and I think it's much better for reflecting on process. I think we learned much more than any other PoP because it just gives you so much more of an insight into what you've been doing. I think it's actually been really worthwhile.

And it shows it so much better, because diaries are words, like we've said already, words can be misinterpreted, film can't really be misinterpreted as much

You also have to massively contextualise it, to describe it first and then reflect, whereas this way you have it, and maybe hand in some supplementary notes with it

Otherwise you might get a situation where students literally just take a film for half an hour and go *oh I'll submit that without editing it or reflecting*

We did a portfolio – it was quite a fat one as well – this big portfolio of notes and plans and risk assessments and research as well as the film

As well as the presentation

It showed that we'd done a lot of research and reflection and the film showed the process and the presentation tied it all together.

EDITING SKILLS

The editing's obviously been important, and obviously that depends on having the skills and the software.

Yeah, I'm completely ... I just can't get my head around it at all

If you don't have the software on your computer ...

The only reason I knew I could do it ... I have a couple of YouTube videos I've made with friends in the past, and I've gotten to grips with the editing and I find it very simple and I find MACs very simple, so it's very easy if you've got that kind of thing. It would have been quite difficult for me to do had I not used it yet. So although it was a very daunting task I knew I could do it because I'd done it on a small scale before, cutting and splicing and together. I didn't read the instructions, I just went with it and see what happens, and it was OK, it's very simple to use once you get the hang of it.

Windows have got a similar one, Windows MovieMaker and I find that – it's very, very simple to learn, very simple to use, but not everybody has it, and it's not on my laptop, I know that for a start

It's downloadable. You can download it free.

OK! Damn. Should have maybe done that then I could have helped you!

To make this work in terms of the skills that we need to be training, and stuff that we need to be telling people about, this editing side is quite important.

I think almost it is just that awareness– I had no idea that we could have done something – I've just got a standard laptop set up – if I'd known that I could just download MovieMaker...

I think it would be good if they could advocate stuff like using a camera and then maybe give a half hour session on this is the software you can get, it's free to download, if you have a MAC you can get iMovie - and just give a quick tutorial

You could have the library running those sort of sessions. Coz they do them in times, sometimes, there's time where people can't make, I think well I really want to use video but I can't make that day, or something

Or if there's an option that you can go and talk to someone about editing, it doesn't mean you have to turn up for one specific time, but just to know that there is someone there on hand

OTHER PCI MODULES

Also, just thinking, because you're nearing the end now, looking back what modules would this have been most useful on?

Collab, in first year and in second year, I know second year a lot of them were with outside partners but even for the planning of the sessions - not filming sessions that are worked in prisons, but certainly in the planning stages that could have been nice to have a camera. And certainly in first year Collab 1

I think if you ask anyone, Collab 1 is a bit overwhelming really because it's a massive project - it's just literally 30 creative students thrown in a room and told to get on with it, and how do we negotiate this, whose going to taking a lead ...

You have to have a scribe to write down the sessions, I remember I was a scribe – if I'd had the camera, it would have been well, *done*. It would have been so much easier.

And on top of that, all of the Process of Performance modules

My Collab 2 last year was in an art gallery, we didn't work with outside partners in an ethical sense like prisons or hostels or schools, we worked in an art gallery. We did an interactive piece. Each of us had a response to a piece of art in the gallery in Parkinson Building, and the set up for it in that gallery is brilliant for weaving your way through a story because of all the walls. But we couldn't really see – although we had an outside eye, as performers we couldn't see how it looked because there was one here, and another one here which ran through to here ... we couldn't see how it looked – so it would have been really handy to have something like this camera.

In any module where every member of your group is involved in a creative process the camera – video documentation – it acts as that outside eye, it acts as an audience member in a way that can then be accessed by everyone who was involved in the creative process, and at that time couldn't see it for themselves

All of the Practical ones, basically

Any module that is process focused – and obviously I think somewhere like a prison the logistics and bureaucracy of getting a camera into a prison it probably wouldn't happen ... negotiating permission to use a camera, that's all part of the process, isn't it (with external partners)

It depends on the project I think. I wouldn't use the camera to create an aesthetic – to film a product. It's great for what it does and it's perfect for that kind of work, but if we wanted to do projection or work with film as a ...

...it kind of depends what you're going for, if you accept that the whole sort of aesthetic is the kind of bootleg, rough DIY kind of look then possibly ...

But that's not really ... in that way, these are kind of perfect because nobody in first year undergraduate degrees here really need high quality film necessarily –

... because the marking process is not really about that, it's about reflection – these three years are about reflection – if you're trying to make a piece which is all done though film and it's going to look amazing, then yeah, find some better cameras, but for just documenting .. it's not terrible quality, (not like a mobile film from 5 years ago) exactly ... it's just not HD amazing video

That's just made me remember, the amount of times that I ... well I imagine we all used to film sequences on mobiles to make sure it looks all right ... So that's just proved how vital it would have been.

Carole Kirk, Digitalis Project, June 2012