

Bringing the world to our doorstep

Using videoconferencing to bridge the gap between University and 'out there'

University learning in almost every subject area involves students reflecting upon the world beyond the University. Such learning can become even more powerful when students can interact directly with relevant external settings. Innovative work supported by the Visual Learning Lab CETL has developed exciting ways of using videoconferencing to allow students to travel across the campus, the county and the continent without leaving the classroom. It has allowed veterinary students to observe operations, language students to speak with native speakers, and teacher trainees to experience life in the classroom.

Videoconferencing is not what most people think about when they consider ways of utilising new technologies to enhance student learning. It is a technology which has been around for over 20 years. However, its iteration as a learning tool in the HE context is still moving apace.

In recent years, teacher training students in the School of Education have benefited from the pioneering work of VLL Co-Director Dr Do Coyle. Dr Coyle and her team set up a whole network of UK and European Schools to allow students to visit classrooms remotely from a teaching room in Jubilee Campus. These interactive teaching and learning observatories (iTLOs) allow students not only to observe lessons in real-time, but also talk to the teacher afterwards. "iTLOs," says Dr Coyle, "allow the development of international borderless learning communities, bringing together teachers, researchers and learners".

This work has been further developed over the past two years in the School of Nursing, the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science and the School of Modern Languages and Cultures where staff have worked with the Visual Learning Lab to develop videoconferencing applications within their courses.

Modern Language students have been talking to native language speakers of French and German, through partnerships with the INSA Lyon and TU Braunschweig as part of a Cultural Exchange Project. Miss Oranna Speicher from the School says, "The project has certainly captured the imagination of students on both sides of the camera: not only did it add an extra cultural dimension to their learning, it also gave them an authentic communicative experience."

Vet School students can observe consultations and animal operations happening in local practices in real time, from their Sutton

Bonington campus, and discuss with practising Vets the work that they are engaged in. Nursing students, distributed over several campuses, have been able to 'attend' and interact with the same lecture, wherever they are physically located.

"Videoconferencing has a major contribution to make throughout Higher Education," says Professor Roger Murphy, co-Director of the VLL. "Students can easily benefit from all sorts of live interactions with other settings as a way of enriching their learning and contacts with the world beyond the University Campus."



Teacher trainers on Jubilee Campus (on screen) feed back to a teacher after a live classroom observation.

Further info
vll@nottingham.ac.uk