The Power of Visual Learning

Over 90% of UK schools struggle on, without a digital media library.

Everyone wants to Improve Achievement & Assessment - 82% of children learn and retain more through visual learning.

I have been involved in education for over 20 years. As a Professional Tennis Coach, I have coached in many schools. I then learnt about Visual Analysis and introduced this to secondary schools to help improve pupils understanding of movement.

Following this I was asked by 7 County Councils to produce a series of DVDs for Primary Schools. The important element was that the right age child was used to demonstrate the performance required. The set of DVDs covering the Exemplification of the Core Tasks from the QCA Units of Work where accredited by AfPE (Association of Physical Education).

Market research then showed us that schools did not have an indexed media library

Visual media has a huge impact.

Think of the power - and utility - of YouTube. Think of the magic of the silver screen. Sight is usually the sense that people fear losing the most. Lots of things trigger memories – taste, smell, *that* favourite song – but when we remember and imagine, it's in our mind's *eye* that we *see* things. The visual is not the only way we learn, of course, but it is immensely powerful. A visual media library takes that potential and uses it as springboard to generate enthusiastic learning and depth of understanding in all spheres of school life.

History – Pearl Harbor

So it's a sobering thought that, according to Ofsted, more than 90% of UK schools lack an indexed digital library. This is not to say that schools don't use video for teaching and learning and to develop cross-curricular thinking. They do. And many do it very well indeed. Pupils, students and teachers access digital video resources frequently. High quality video content supports dynamic teaching and it can liberate and motivate learners in a way that pre-digital classroom practice frequently does not. In secondary schools especially, many students not only learn from video content, but also produce it. The potential is amazing.
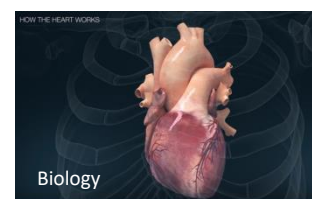
Biology

The resources are there, but hard to find.

Thus, schools already have large quantities of good video resources in use. Schools too are generally collaborative and co-operative environments, with resources loaned and borrowed between teachers and across age groups. But teachers are also individualists, with a wary eye on ageing computer hardware and the risks of losing valued material that has sometimes taken hours to track down or make. The result is that in many schools – if the Ofsted figure is accurate, most schools – digital resources are on individual hard drives, filed on networks without disciplined indexing or kept on memory sticks, which may or may not be passed between colleagues and peers, more or less securely.


Geography – Iceberg

There are several reasons for this sorry state of affairs. Lack of investment plays its part. School broadband width is often surprisingly narrow, which makes it difficult to access materials online with a whole class. Many a teacher will know the agony of having a class set of laptops ready to launch onto an amazing interactive website, only to be frustrated by a network which decides it can load only a dozen of the 25 laptops in use. (The other five are out of action because the return keys have come off.) Computer stock is frequently out of date and overloaded with huge amounts of data. And because time is always at a premium, network drives easily become disorganised as resources are saved somewhere quick rather than somewhere sensible.

The whole experience is frustrating and painful – and it's a huge barrier to learning.

In fact, the issue is not so much the existence of good video and visual resources, but how to handle them. Currently in most schools the situation looks like this,

when really it needs to be like this:
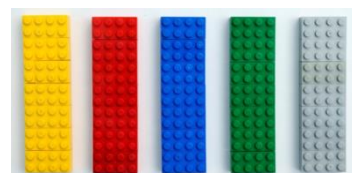
Refining teaching, learning and assessment for the era of Coronavirus (Covid-19)

Covid-19 adds additional pressures. National lockdown necessitated a rapid switch to online learning for the majority of UK school pupils. As lockdown is eased (I'm writing this in early August) the full return to school in September seems less certain than it did a month ago. Real time online learning looks set to stay, at least as part of the provision. Even assuming a return to full 'normal', online and video will still play a larger part than ever before. And with this will come the need to keep recording teaching material, homework and longer assignments. Video evidence of progress and attainment will be more important then ever.

Take a real example described to me by a friend recently. His daughter was asked to make some video clips of her throwing a tennis ball, to measure the length of the throw and count how many times she could catch a ball in 1 minute by throwing into the air and catching it. This was to prove she could do it and how far she could throw it. Pre-Covid 19 this could have been observed easily in a whole-class PE lesson. With pupils collaborating to measure and record, it's a great cross-curricular exercise. Without the whole class dynamic, video really does come to the rescue.

Any school without a well organised digital video library is going to struggle.

A simple solution does exist.

The challenges to change and progress can seem overwhelming. First on the list is time. To organise network storage in logical, transparent and robust ways takes time – something schools are short of. Protocols for indexing need to be agreed and then someone with good technical understanding needs to implement the upgrade. If it's all done in-house, time and resources need to be put aside to enable each department or year group to index its resources in line with agreed guidelines. Then there needs

to be a way to ensure that new material is indexed accurately and saved in the right place, every time. Given the existing pressures on school staff, this is a very big ask. If it's achievable it may well be at the cost of something else equally important.

Then add in security. If a school is really making use of digital video, it won't just be storing copies of third party resources. Staff, pupils and students will be making their own recordings to share and use on site, and possibly off. The number of applications is potentially unlimited. Children could be filmed in discussion to help develop reasoned argument and articulacy, or on the sports' field to analyse technique. Teachers can easily use video and still images to record progress and inform assessment - Early Years are already well advanced on this journey. Pupils, mainly secondary students but in primary as well, may be recording clips at home as part of homework, and these will be stored at school. With thousands of clips of children on file, security needs to be complete and fool-proof.

The time is fast approaching when any school that uses digital video media (that's to say, *all* schools) will need a secure and robust system to store digital media which *also makes it easy to use*. Ten years ago, schools would have said they couldn't afford it. But if we've learnt one thing about communications technology it's that real costs keep falling.

Visual media is one of the most powerful tools available for dynamic long-term learning. Opportunities await for those with the right product. Opportunities await for every single school in the country.

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