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Cultural and Supporting Studies is the academic component of the Art, Design and Media BA (Hons) programmes at Northbrook College Sussex. It is delivered through lectures, seminars and tutorials. Outcomes include written work and student-led seminars which are assessed. Learners tend to use PowerPoint for presentations, as it looks professional and can incorporate text and images. However, as Edward R. Tufte (professor emeritus of political science, computer science and statistics, and graphic design at Yale) points out, the 'relentless sequentiality' of slideware like PowerPoint can privilege 'format over content.' In an editorial in *Wired* magazine (issue 11.09 September 2003), Tufte claims that 'Visual reasoning usually works more effectively when relevant information is shown side by side.'

The aim of this project was to explore the use of posters as a visual aid, in order to improve the learning experience of both presenters and audience in an assessment situation. Twenty level 2 students on the BA (Hons) Fine Art course took part. Students completed initial questionnaires on their experience of delivering and listening to PowerPoint presentations and were given a briefing on poster design. Following seminars using posters, learners completed comparative questionnaires and some were interviewed. Three main aspects were investigated:

- 1) Initial organisation of research into PowerPoint or poster format
- 2) Experience of presenting using both formats
- 3) Experience as the member of the audience of the presentations and as a participant in the subsequent group discussions.

The results of the research indicated clear individual preferences which accorded to different ways of organising and communicating information. With regards to organisation of research, the initial questionnaires showed that, all 20 students, bar 1, felt that preparing and delivering a presentation was a useful way of organising research prior to writing an essay. After the project just under half of the students stated a preference for preparing presentations using PowerPoint, saying it is 'easier' and 'more logical.' In contrast, just over half the students preferred making posters, stating they are suited to 'work-in-progress', more 'hands-on' and more interesting to prepare. Interestingly, the students who are dyslexic or describe their working method as 'non-sequential' favoured posters, whilst learners who prefer a linear approach liked PowerPoint – 'my brain is chaotic and PowerPoint organises it.'

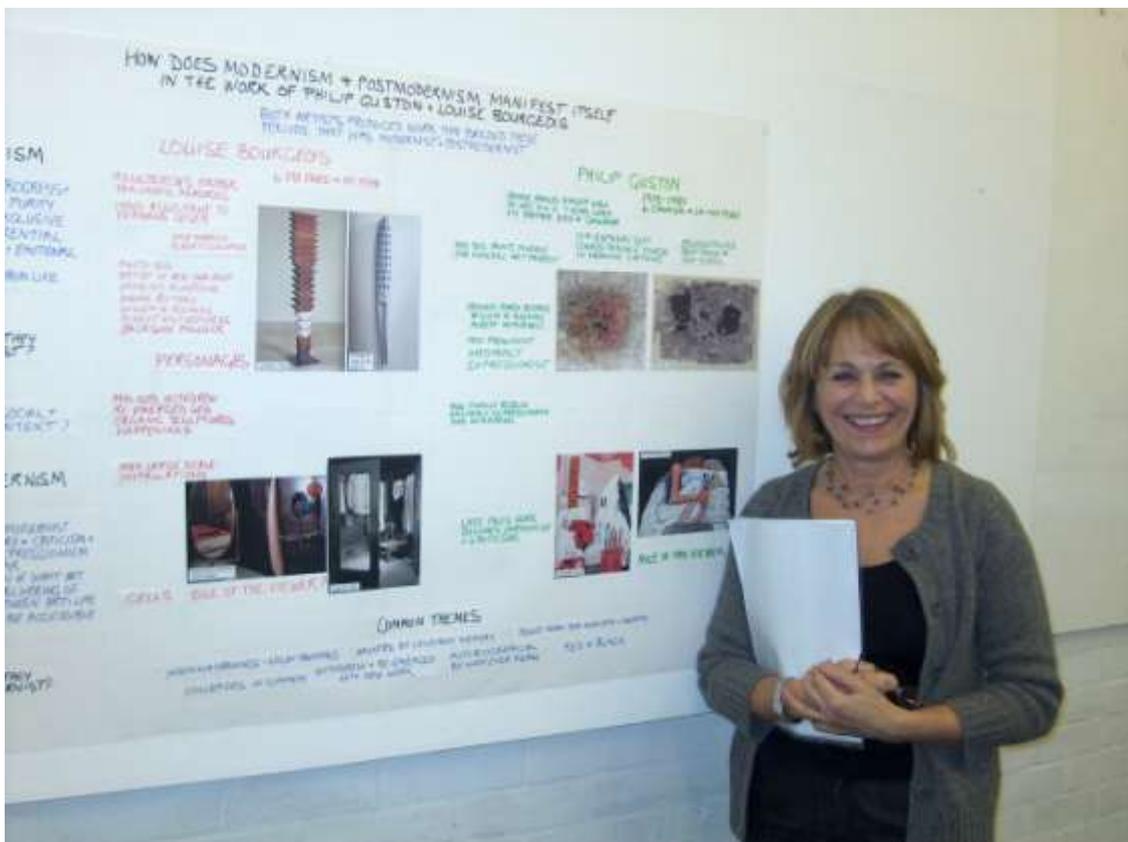
Initially, 7 of the 20 students described standing up in front of the group as being difficult, and 6 identified using technology as cause for concern. This situation was

exacerbated the 'front-of-class' use of PowerPoint, with the presenter standing in front of seated colleagues and delivered a 'talk'. For the poster presentation, we took the furniture out of the seminar room, and moved between different posters in an informal group.

In the follow-up questionnaires, 5 students said they preferred presenting with PowerPoint, because it was 'more logical', 'more professional' and 'clearer'. However, the rest preferred using with posters: remarking that: 'I felt more focussed and in control', 'I remembered more', 'It was less restrictive and more creative', 'It was good to have all the information on view at the same time'.

Initially, a quarter of students did not find the group discussion following their PowerPoint presentation helpful. Following the poster presentation 100% of students said they found the discussions useful: 'There was discussion, rather than just questions & answers', 'People seemed to be more involved', 'Discussions were of a more dynamic nature', 'It felt more comfortable and less formal'. As an audience, 2 students preferred PowerPoint, 3 students said they enjoyed watching both, and the rest preferred the posters: 'The variety of styles for the posters made them more interesting to look at.'

The overall outcome of the project was a greater student ownership of the presentation process. Since the project this group has been given a choice of presentation modes. A third of students tend still to use PowerPoint, while the other two thirds use posters. Offering a choice promotes student-centred learning in an assessment situation.



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