

## **Guerrilla teaching and DIY exhibitions: How an assault on comfort zones can engage and inspire**

Martin Compton, Amy Jackson-Bruce, Viktor Krastev  
University of Greenwich, Ravensbourne University, Imperial College London

### **Abstract**

This case study and video show the process and outcomes of a 'flash' briefing to a group of first-year Fashion Promotion students. The surprise collaborative task was presented to the students outside the comfort of their usual lab space and required them to likewise exhibit previously produced 'zines' in a space away from the host institution. With a view to helping students understand how sub-culture artefacts can be exhibited using low-cost, guerrilla marketing strategies, the lecturer drew on some of these same strategies to present the brief. Engagement and participation levels are demonstrably high and the final exhibition is an evident success; the whole experience, we argue, suggests that to challenge norms and to take such risks may well produce positive outcomes. Whilst we believe this case is potentially relevant to anyone interested in higher education pedagogy, the approach is likely to appeal immediately to anyone teaching subjects where promotion is fundamental as well as to those where marketing principles are elemental.

Link to the video: <https://youtu.be/0B7dwbd7S8c>

**Keywords:** Zine, marketing, guerrilla marketing, edupunk, problem-based learning, PBL, situated learning, video, exhibition, promotion

### **1. Introduction**

A series of fortunate events brought together a Fashion Promotion and UX/UI lecturer at Ravensbourne (a specialist design and digital media University), an academic developer from the University of Greenwich (a comparatively large post-1992 university) and a video producer from Imperial College London. As part of a Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCert), the Fashion Promotion lecturer was required to video her taught session then reflect on it. As part of his own research into unorthodox approaches to observation for professional learning in higher education (HE), the academic developer was invited to observe the videoed session. The video producer was, in turn, invited to record the session and the subsequent student exhibition to ensure adequate audio and video quality was achieved in unconventional settings. Whilst it was not originally conceived as a paper, we were all, in our own ways and in terms of our own interests, inspired by the taught session and what the students achieved as a consequence. The account below and the accompanying video illustrate what we feel is an excellent example of the potential of risk-taking and problem-based learning (PBL) inspired by the 'guerrilla' tactics of flash marketing campaigns. Whilst it may be fair to argue that the approach was more likely to have flourished in creative contexts, its application reflects wider acknowledgement that business and marketing educators need to consider how work environments and work practices are

foregrounding gaps in students' work-readiness as curricula struggle to keep pace (Ye et al., 2017).

### 2. Context

First year undergraduates on a Graphic Communication module (part of the BA Fashion Promotion programme) had been producing a 'zine' series. These hand-produced, photocopied and self-published works are associated with subcultures and, in contrast to the computer-mediated work typical on their undergraduate programme, provide a stark counterpoint to polished, high production value publications. As Duncombe (2014, p.6) puts it: "...scruffy, homemade little pamphlets. Little publications filled with rantings of high weirdness and exploding with chaotic designs." Whilst the students were aware from the start of the zine production requirement, the lecturer contrived to present them with an additional task. Conventionally this might be labelled a surprise, collaborative, formative assessment. The briefing and task were much more unconventional, however. In line with the sub-culture thread and the ultimate goal of the task, students were invited to join the lecturing team at a creative/artistic space beyond the typical lab or classroom (in this case the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London <http://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern>) and, once there, told that their 'problem' was that they were all part of a creative direction agency and had two weeks to set up and then hold a 'guerrilla/ flash do-it-yourself (DIY) zine exhibition', open to the general public in a suitable location at least a mile from the host institution and on a budget of just £54. The accompanying video shows extracts from both the briefing and exhibition. The narration from the lecturer and one of the students is complemented below by responses to and perceptions of the briefing and exhibition from our positions as the lecturer, an observer and a film-maker.

### 3. Guerrilla Teaching

After an observation of her teaching, the PGCert mentor of the Fashion Promotion lecturer at Ravensbourne challenged her to ensure that digitally focused practice did not give students an opportunity to hide behind screens whilst appearing to engage in class-based tasks. This drove her to consider the possibilities of real-world, situated learning opportunities which align closely to the recommendations of Rohm et al. (2019) who argue for more problem-based, experiential and skills-oriented approaches to marketing education. Such approaches, when trialled using colonised space for exhibition-like events as an initial part of the first-year zine task, presented unexpected challenges. The physical space of the institution and the way timetabling is managed in some ways discourage situated and problem-based approaches. "The new Ravensbourne was designed as an institution that would show the way for others. The plan always was that everyone should be flexible about their use of the space." (Hodges, 2010); nevertheless, it impeded some activities typically associated with promotion events. At Ravensbourne, teaching spaces are shared and classes migrate from one space to another lesson by lesson, meaning that teachers wanting to show physical objects within the class have to transport, arrange, put up and then take down these displays within a single session. What began as an effort to place more value upon non-digital teaching and learning opportunities became a desire to experiment with where the learning happened. The Fashion Promotion lecturer sensed an opportunity to present some of the realities of exhibiting work under such constraints as are experienced in 'real world' contexts, particularly in relation to guerrilla marketing approaches, rather than

## Case Studies

those – much less relevant – imposed by such internal institutional circumstances as timetabling and room sizes. She therefore asked the class to meet outside of the campus environment to receive a briefing about a ‘flash’ zine exhibition in the Tate Modern Turbine Hall. The space was chosen because: it connected to the brief in terms of its function as an art gallery; it challenges many of the norms of gallery spaces; and, pragmatically, it is accessible and free to enter.

The outside observer was immediately struck by the similarity of the activity design to the controversial practices of the ‘Edupunk’ movement, though such an approach was not consciously followed or advocated. The DIY nature of the zines themselves, the deliberate eschewal of both the comfortable and familiar digital and physical spaces and even the punk aesthetic of the venue later chosen by the students echoed the Edupunk challenge to the hegemony of monolithic institutional systems and constrained practices (Wheeler, 2015). The emphasis on personally-defined goals for each individual within the group and the contrast between this and other more traditional teaching and assessment strategies on the programme also located it in this domain (Kamenetz, 2010).

There was, however, a conscious attempt to exploit and raise awareness of guerrilla marketing techniques. This approach is defined by its unconventionality, low costs, creativity and very narrow targeting of potential consumers (Levinson and Godin, 1994). The invitation to the Tate Modern, the raising of anticipation about the purpose of the visit and the big ‘reveal’ that can be seen at the start of the video all draw on guerrilla marketing techniques, as does the approach that the students were then encouraged to take. Much more evidently deliberate in the pedagogic design of the flash briefing was the social learning conception of PBL. Central to this is that the ‘problem’ is something that pushes students beyond existing knowledge: it cannot be immediately resolved but requires active investigation by the students working together (Barrett, 2005). This task required core outcomes of a PBL approach: effective problem solving; self-direction; effective collaboration; intrinsic motivation (Hmelo-Silver, 2004) and developing student understanding of specialist knowledge and transferable skills (Barrett and Cashman, 2010). The flash zine exhibition also had value in its connection to contemporary creative practice in industry where independent publishing is challenged by a decline in sales resulting in a diversification of launch strategies and the adoption of experiential marketing tactics. This connection to industry and practical coursework is valued and sought after by students who often take study positions at Ravensbourne for its live briefs and close connections with industry. The approach taken here clearly emphasises what Rohm et al. (2019) define as the four essential skillsdevelopment areas for workplace-ready marketing students: creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication skills.

The challenge of putting together a temporary exhibition in a short period whilst displaying publications made on the fly (itself a two-week brief) captured the creative minds of the students. Though it was not possible for this to become a portfolio piece for future display, it proved to be of value in the raising of students’ confidence and belief in their ability to execute, with little notice, innovative and creative marketing. In this way, the challenge – and course module – had a lasting effect on the students involved.

### 4. Guerrilla Teaching

In many ways, the off-campus venue of the briefing and the unpredictable location of the exhibition mirror the ephemerality of the zines themselves. The situation drove us to seek a way to challenge this ephemerality, to capture both events and to produce the accompanying video artefact. In its own way, the video is a valuable record, not just for presenting a summary of the approach and its outcomes but also as a way of capturing the essence of a pedagogic approach and the core lessons learned – from both a lecturer and a student perspective.

Media technologies, especially video, have proven to be very powerful tools when it comes to motivating, engaging and/or instructing students. Because of its transformability and transferability, video can open new horizons in teaching and learning (Woolfitt, 2015). In this case, the documentary record provides a point of focus for lecturer reflections, evidence of a successful collaboration and achievement by the students and an artefact to prompt other lecturers and future students to value guerrilla approaches to teaching or self-promotion. In short, video can enhance not only the overall educational experience, but it can also be a very valuable tool for reflection (Cheng and Chau, 2009; Schmid, 2011).

A key challenge around the videoing of the session was to be able to capture the natural essence and feelings of the process without actually interfering or posing any influence on the students or the lecturer. The venue itself assisted with this but also presented a technical challenge. The background noise and activity of other visitors to the Tate Modern and then the exhibition space selected by the students (Rye Wax record shop and club in Peckham, London <http://www.ryewax.com/>) needed accommodating though it also provided a convenient mask to the filming and enabled the film-maker to blend in. It was also crucial to enable the students to be as natural and comfortable as possible in terms of the presence of a camera and for them to be comfortable discussing in an unfamiliar and comparatively uncomfortable space, so hand-held equipment and only basic video recording techniques were used. After a brief reconnaissance of the locations and by carefully looking into the structure of the lesson, the video producer decided that a handheld, digital, single-lens camera, and a wireless 'clipper' microphone would be used. The ability to move freely around the spaces, without compromising the sound quality, allowed him to successfully follow the narration of the lesson, and at the same time to video capture the natural flow of the student experience and interactions. The same clipper microphones were used to capture the lecturer's reflections in situ and this was overlaid in the post-production stage.

### 5. Conclusions

This session was not a one-off; nor could it be described as typical of the curriculum design of the degree programme. Nevertheless, its success made us all conscious of what can be gained from taking risks and by donning our coats and escaping the labs and lecture halls. As evidenced from the lecturer comments, student engagement in the video and the exhibition itself, the separation of students from the comfort of the traditional classroom more than achieved the broad goal of enabling students to see beyond the creative activities they had previously been engaged in within an essentially artificial learning context and instead to grasp how their ideas and strategies might shape up in the face of the working world realities of self-publicising and exhibiting on minimal budgets. That collaboration lay at the heart of the activity presented some risk, but even had the whole thing dissolved in acrimony among

the participants, opportunities would still have arisen for discussion of the nature of what makes successful collaboration, especially when high rewards might accrue.

Building creative confidence in the student cohort is a goal that defines the whole programme and is something that all the students identified as a key behaviour they wanted to develop when entering the course at the start of this year. Their responses to this one activity indicate to us very clearly that it has gone some way to achieving that aim. In terms of fashion promotion, it is hard to imagine something more professionally valuable to the students than the opportunity to see how they can build relationships with a cultural venue that sells and distributes independent publications. Publication and exhibition are themes revisited throughout the course and this experience provided students with a reminder of opportunities that exist when their individually innovative, artistic and imaginative endeavours are taken out into wider creative communities. In the creative world 'employability' is so much more than demonstrating skills. Increasingly, these new skills are seen as prerequisites in the traditionally less creative programmes undertaken by business and marketing students. Whatever the area of study, this case study illuminates how connections are made and how the levels and mechanisms of promotion, influence and contacts are interconnected. More now than ever before, therefore, to use such guerrilla tactics in your teaching you do not need to be working in a creative field. We believe that the approach could be applied to any discipline, so long as you are willing to risk breaking away from the comfort of the classroom

### Reference list

Barrett, T. (2005) 'What is problem-based learning?' In: *Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching*. O'Neill, G., Moore, S. and McMullin, B. (eds.). Dublin: AISHE. ISBN: 978-0955013409

Barrett, T. and Cashman, D. (2010) *A Practitioner's Guide to Enquiry and Problem-Based Learning*. Dublin: UCD Teaching and Learning. ISBN: 9978-1905254-45-3

Cheng, G. and Chau, J. (2009) 'Digital video for fostering self-reflection in an ePortfolio environment.' *Learning, Media and Technology*, 34(4), 337-350. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439880903338614> (Accessed: 16 December 2019).

Duncombe, S. (2014) *Notes from underground: Zines and the politics of alternative culture*. Portland, United States: Microcosm Publishing. ISBN: 9781934620373

Hmelo-Silver, C.E. (2004) 'Problem-based learning: What and how do students learn?' *Educational Psychology Review*, 16, 235-266. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:EDPR.0000034022.16470.f3> (Accessed: 16 December 2019).

## Case Studies

Hodges, L. (2010) 'Ravensbourne college gets ready to move in to eye-catching new premises.' The Independent. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/higher/ravensbourne-college-gets-ready-to-move-in-to-eye-catching-new-premises-2026802.html> (Accessed: 18 March 2019).

Kamenetz, A. (2010) *DIY U: Edupunks, edupreneurs, and the coming transformation of higher education*. White River Junction, Vermont, United States: Chelsea Green Publishing. ISBN: 9781603582346

Levinson, J.C. and Godin, S. (1994) *The guerrilla marketing handbook*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. ISBN: 0046442700139

Rohm, A.J., Stefl, M. and Saint Clair, J. (2019) 'Time for a marketing curriculum overhaul: Developing a digital-first approach.' *Journal of Marketing Education*, 41(1), 47-59. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475318798086> (Accessed: 16 December 2019).

Schmid, E.C. (2011) 'Video-stimulated reflection as a professional development tool in interactive whiteboard research.' *ReCALL*, 23(3), 252-270. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344011000176> (Accessed: 16 December 2019).

Wheeler, S. (2015) *Learning with 'e's: educational theory and practice in the digital age*. Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing. ISBN: 978-1845909390

Woolfitt, Z. (2015) 'The effective use of video in higher education.' *Lectoraat Teaching, Learning and Technology*. Rotterdam: Inholland University of Applied Sciences. Available at: <https://www.inholland.nl/media/10230/the-effective-use-of-video-in-higher-education-woolfittoctober-2015.pdf> (Accessed: 21 March 2019).

Ye, C., Van Os, J., Chapman, D. and Jacobson, D. (2017) 'An online project-based competency education approach to marketing education.' *Journal of Marketing Education*, 39, 162-175. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475317724843> (Accessed: 16 December 2019).