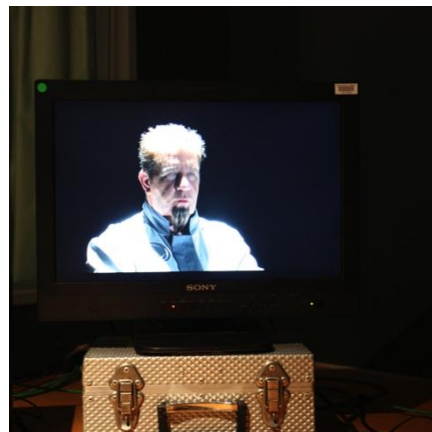# Teaching TV

Collaboration in action

Presented by Joe Citizen and John Mandelberg

This presentation will cover:

- Why is it important to teach collaboration for television production?

- What are the realities for students learning about making television?

- What are the barriers to teaching collaborative skills?

- What particular difficulties did we encounter that hindered collaborative learning?
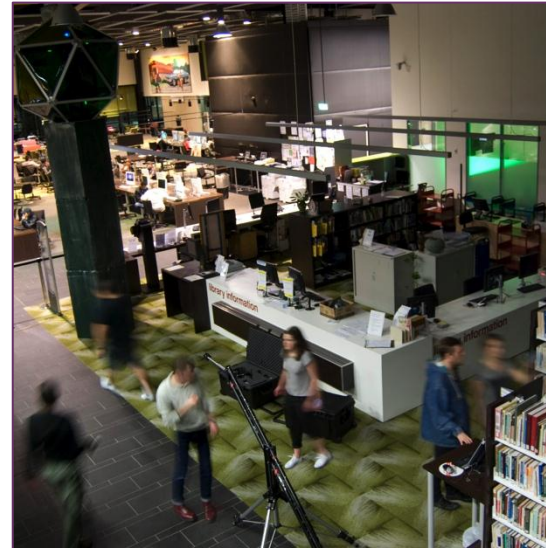
- Where do we go from here?
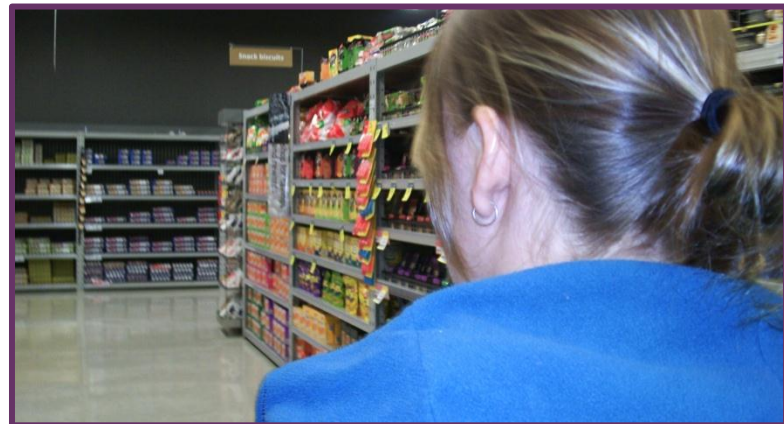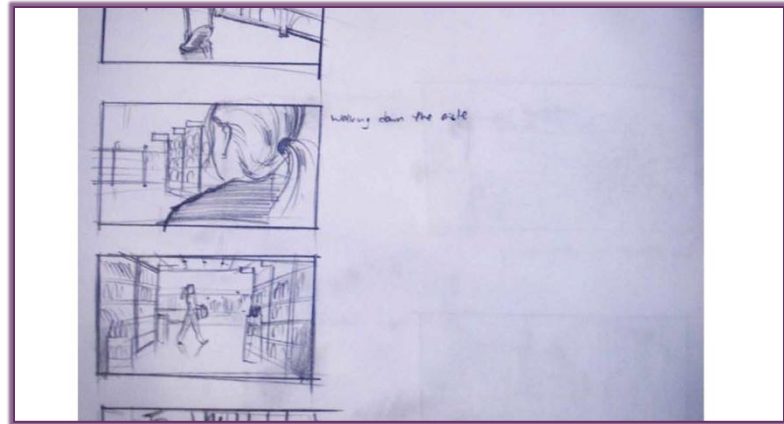
Projects to date

- *The Couch* TV sitcom pilot

- ✧ 3rd year moving image technology class makes a 30 min pilot over 2 weekends and several days.

- ✧ Shot on location and in the studio, using a multi-cam technique.

- *Vortex* Interactive game

- ✧ 3rd year moving image technology class makes an interactive game over 2 weekends.

- ✧ Shot in studio and on location at Wintec's Library & Atrium, using a multi-cam technique.

Why is it important that students learn how to collaborate?

- Making television is a collaborative enterprise – its typically made by groups of people, not individuals.

- Hodge (2009) believes that collaboration allows an individual to "work well with a rich variety of personalities [and] to consider a wider set of artistic possibilities, resulting in the realization of a more compelling artistic vision."

- Sabal (2009) says that collaboration is "a dynamic space where a student's agency is asserted and tested – where a student learns who and how to be in the world."

Why is collaboration important for art educators?

- Collaboration allows students to learn through an interaction rather than simply receiving knowledge through a 'transmission' model. It fits within a constructivist model of learning which views learning as:
  - An active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge, and
 - Instruction is a process of supporting that construction rather than communicating knowledge.

  (Duffy and Cunningham 1996, cited in Laurillard, 2002)

- Working together makes good sense when funds are limited: "It is inefficient to promote quality via competition when higher education has necessarily limited income for providing a public service. The already meagre resources are spread even more thinly as academics compete and and thereby repeat."

  (Laurillard, 2002)

What are the realities for students learning how to make television?
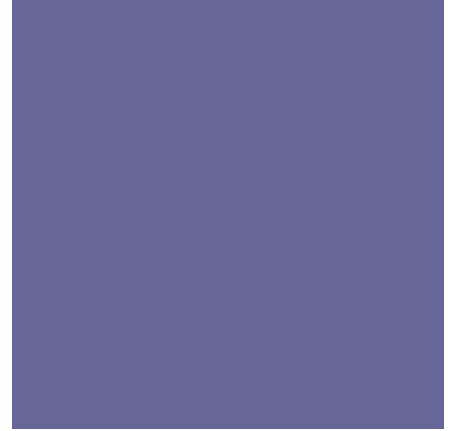
Students pay for their education

- Students often come with expectations of what they want to learn based on pop culture models:

- "Having internalized the success story of their filmmaking idols, by the time students walk into a film production classroom, they do so with a clear understanding of what it takes to 'make it.'" (Sabal, 2009)

Influence of the Auteur

- "One of the challenges for the film production teacher is how to foster a collaborative environment in a group project-orientated film production class when there is so much emphasis on each student having his or her own "vision" or "artistic identity." The romantic notion of the artist standing outside of society is both a fiction and an impediment to quality artistic production." (Sabal, 2009)

Educational pedagogies are different to industry priorities

- Whilst our degree attempts to equip students with the skills to enter industry, it remains a space where students can learn, make mistakes, challenge themselves and be challenged:

- "Collaboration in student filmmaking is, of course, significantly different from collaboration in industry filmmaking… they are being graded individually for their group efforts… and everyone is learning their craft as they perform it." (Hodge, 2009)
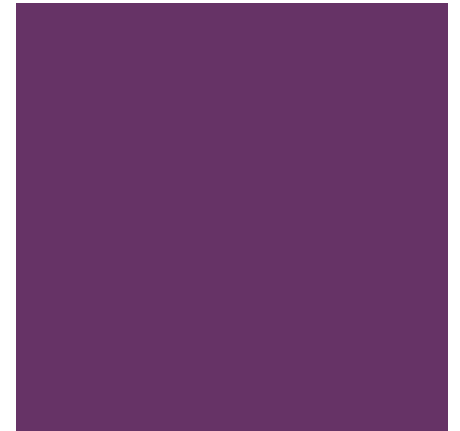
Difficulties in teaching collaborative skills

Is what we do well overshadowing what we're not doing so well in?

+ Emphasis on the technical aesthetic

■ We tend to emphasise proficiency in the technical aesthetic, and assume collaboration will be learnt as part of the group experience:

■ Students are "too often expected to master collaboration on their own, as if it were an innate skill, not a learned one." (Hodge, 2009)

■ Multi-camera work is time and labour intensive – facilitation of collaborative skills often feels impossible.

■ **However,** we know technology and will change: "As educators it is our duty to to direct our students toward learning these more difficult but ultimately more enduring aspects of media production."

(Sabal, 2009)

Industry and education priorities

- There are implied power relationships between different roles found in industry. If we uncritically reproduce these roles in our attempt to provide students with industry skills, then we risk recreating these power relationships.

- In an educational setting however, students should be equal to one another: "it is critical for students to think of themselves as part of a learning community, rather than a simple production group." (Sabal, 2009)

Managing conflict

- "groups do not always function so perfectly. The blending of ideas and personalities can be powerfully effective, but if personalities and ideas are in conflict, it can be crushingly painful." (Sabal, 2009)

- With an emphasis on the technical process (usually under time pressure), do we neglect essential conflict negotiation skills?

- However: "Making collaboration a *conscious* activity can enable students to more successfully negotiate the complex relationships filmmaking entails." (Hodge, 2009)

Teaching television:
The reality of collaboration

What hindrances did we encounter to good collaborative practice whilst working on our two multi-camera productions?

Financial pressures

For students

- Large collaborative projects place pressures on student's available time to make an income to support themselves.

- Shooting in spaces that either provide services to all students (the Library), or are usually hired (the Atrium) meant having to practice and shoot after-hours, often at short notice. This put increased time pressure on students.

For the projects

- Multi-camera projects are technology intensive. Research funding is used to hire items which are not covered by departmental expenditure. Shooting times and collaborative input is by necessity truncated.

- Unforeseen institutionally generated costs (e.g. paying to have fire alarms turned off) must be carried by the project, resulting in funding inefficiencies.

Lack of institutional engagement

"Collaboration matters. In some cases, it may make the difference between institutional success and failure."

(Dearing, 1997 cited in Laurillard 2002)
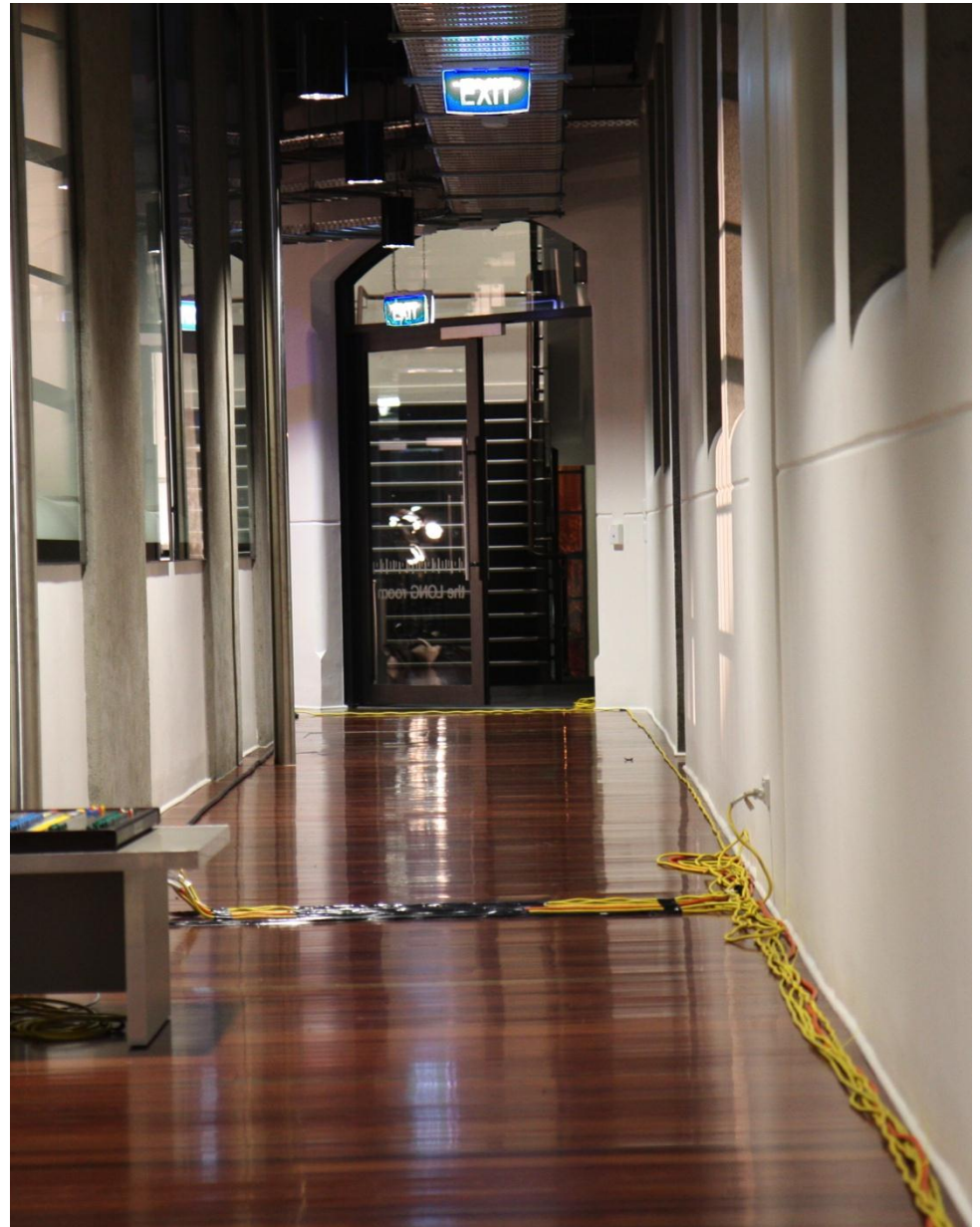
+ Not business as usual

- Interdisciplinary work might be an identified educational goal, but it has been hard to achieve without it either:
  - Not fitting into existing curricula frameworks.
  - Needing long notice, usually well before development time.
- Difficulty in accessing other school's resources without an immediate benefit for that school's students being seen.

+ Politics

- Requests for resources outside of a department/school's ordinary use often resulted in:
    - Too hard – no response
    - Shifting of responsibility in cyclical patterns
    - Entanglement with existing inter-departmental politics

- This sends mixed messages to students who are trying to learn best collaborative practice.

- Delays increase time pressure on students and staff alike.

Semester time pressure

- Rigid semester structure is good for organisational efficiency, but lacks flexibility.

- The class runs for 15 weeks from late summer to the beginning of winter – shoots need to occur inside by the time students are ready.

- Construction and other activities have to be done after hours or in available holidays.

- This places extreme demands on students limited time, and may impact their other studies.
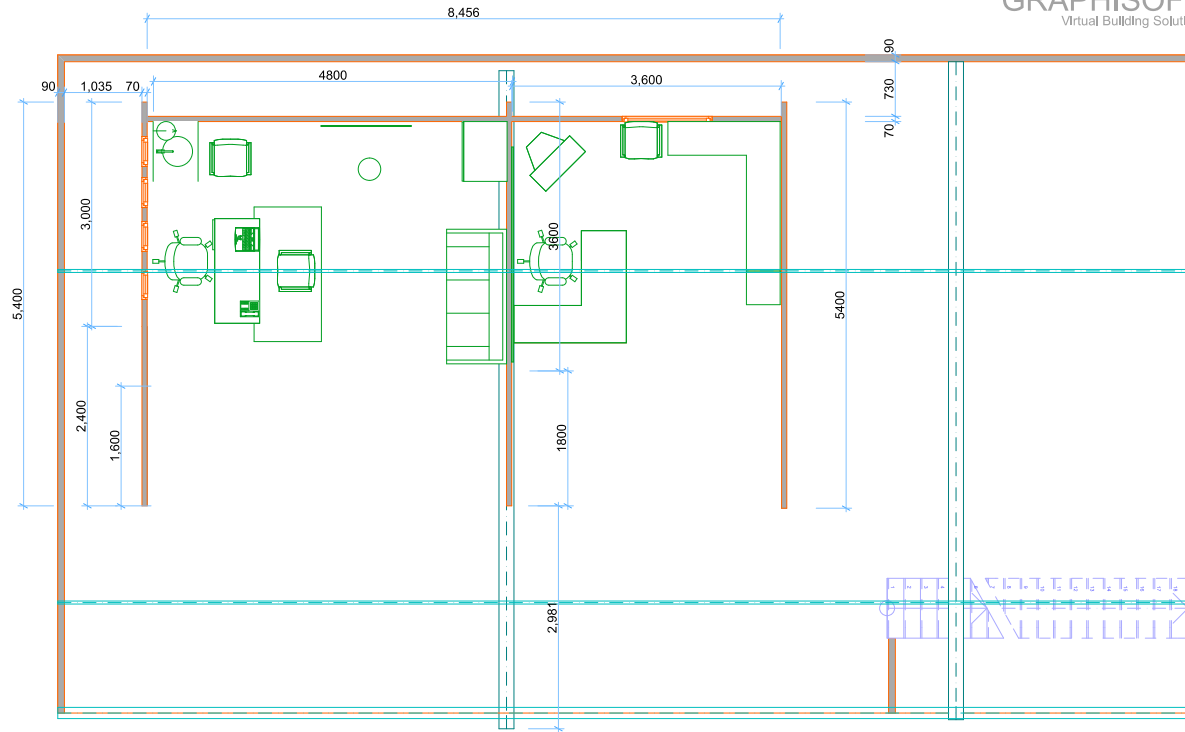
Where do we go from here?

What can we do to increase our student's collaborative skills?

More research needed

- We need to do more research into incorporating collaborative learning into our existing course structure.

- What practical activities could use to foster collaborative thinking?

- Negotiating creative conflict: We need to do more research on how to help provide students with life skills that will enable them to practice effectively within large interdisciplinary teams.

References

Hodge, C. (2009). Film collaboration and creative conflict. *Journal of Film and Video 61*(1), 18-30.

Laurillard, D. (2002). *Rethinking university education: A conversational framework for the effective use of learning technologies.* New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Sabal, R. (2009). The individual in collaborative media production. *Journal of Film and Video 61*(1), 6-17.