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2008

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TYSTYSGRIF UWCHRADDDEG ADDYSGU MEWN ADDYSG UWCH

POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Cylch Dygu 3 | Teaching Cycle 3

Assessing Students for Research Skills in a Human Geography Fieldwork Module

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Teaching Development III: Assessing students for research skills in a Human Geography fieldwork module

"Effective learning cannot be expected just because we take students into the field." (Lonergan and Andreson, 1988, page 70)

Introduction

Despite recent concerns about the role of fieldwork in geography teaching at university, it is clear that it overwhelmingly continues to be regarded by human and physical geographers alike as a vital and valuable component of a geographical education. Increasingly, pedagogic critiques of geography fieldwork at university - above all, that fieldwork activities are predominantly descriptive and in some cases voyeuristic - are being addressed by a move towards fieldwork of a more critical and analytical nature (Fuller et al 2007; Latham and McCormack, 2007; May, 1999; Sidaway, 2002).

As Lonergan and Andreson (1988, page 70) observe, "effective learning cannot be expected just because we take students into the field." If planned and implemented carefully, however, fieldwork can in fact play a significant role in facilitating deeper learning amongst students, by providing them with an immediate and engaging means of exploring in depth and reflecting on the geographical theories they have learned about in the lecture theatre. The practical experience of 'doing' geography, moreover, can be of immense value to the development of individual dissertation projects or other pieces of independent research as well as to the development of their transferable skills. In addition, because fieldwork allows students to explore geographical theories and concepts in 'real-world' contexts rather than in the lecture theatre, it can provide a powerful means of inspiring students and engaging them with their chosen discipline. From my own point of view as a lecturer, the capacity for fieldwork to inspire students is undoubtedly one of the most rewarding aspects of contributing to this area of teaching.

2 As Fuller et al (2006, page 94) emphasise, effective fieldwork needs to be fully integrated with the broader course or degree programme. This may mean linking the field course to the development of individual student research projects, but also to the themes, concepts and theories explored in lecture-based modules.
Like any other module, a fieldwork course necessarily involves summative as well as formative assessment. When I first contributed to the IGES fieldwork module in 2005-6, it struck me that, although students engaged with a range of research methods and different types of data collection in the field, certain elements of assessment for the module did not appear to provide as much scope as would be desirable for assessing students' skills in using these varied methods and data sources, even though the development of research skills is highlighted in the module's intended learning outcomes.

Recent pedagogic literature clearly emphasises the need for alignment between the aims of a given course of study and the ways in which it is assessed (Biggs and Tang, 2007; Light and Cox, 2001; Ramsden, 2003). This is important not only because assessment should evaluate how well students have achieved the intended outcomes of the course (rather than testing their ability to regurgitate memorised knowledge - unless this is the course objective!) - but also because it has been shown that assessment influences the ways in which students learn. In other words, if students are to be encouraged to learn in particular ways, we need to pay careful attention to how they are assessed, and ensure that assessment is treated as an integral part of teaching rather than as an add-on or afterthought (Biggs and Tang, 2007, page 169). In the second teaching cycle discussed in this portfolio, I focused on the use of formative assessment by means of class-based exercises in order to facilitate students' acquisition of particular skills. This cycle, by contrast, constitutes an attempt to improve alignment between the forms of assessment used in the fieldwork module and the skills that this module seeks to develop.

Overview
My teaching cycle and report focus on my contributions to the Human Geography fieldwork module in 2006-7 and in the current academic year of 2007-8 (see Appendix 3.1 for module outline). The module currently involves a week-long visit to New York (including time spent travelling), preceded by a series of preparatory lectures and practical sessions, and during the last few years it has been co-taught by five staff who make similar contributions in
terms of academic input and workload. Because I do not act as co-ordinator for this module, I do not have the same level of control over the way in which it is organised and taught as I do in the case of the modules discussed in the teaching cycles 1 and 2.

Since I initiated this teaching cycle in the previous academic year, the format of the fieldwork module has undergone considerable reorganisation with a view to developing a more student-led approach and one which encourages students to view their work as real geographical research rather than simply as a set of assignments. Until 2006-7, pre-fieldwork teaching sessions consisted mainly of traditional lectures that provided students with background information on the principal themes that they would be studying during the fieldtrip. In 2007, the fieldtrip and preparatory lectures focused on the following themes:

- After Ground Zero: Landscapes of power and memorialisation
- Place and politics of identity
- Nature and New York
- Greenwich Village and the Meat-Packing District
- Museums and the politics of representation

In the current academic year, the museums theme was removed, but the remaining four themes were re-used. The pre-fieldtrip lectures, however, were replaced by four workshops in which student groups gave presentations on research projects that they proposed to conduct in New York. As discussed below, this change in format has had some implications, both for my contributions to the module and for my teaching intervention, which I had not anticipated in 2006-7.

In addition to the adoption of workshops involving group work and presentations, the number of pieces of assessed work that students are required to submit was reduced this year from four to three. In previous years, students were asked to write an assessed background essay prior to the
fieldtrip on one of the themes discussed in the lectures, but this has now been replaced by the workshops and group presentations. The pre-fieldtrip presentations are not formally assessed, but students are given constructive feedback on their research proposals and on their presentation skills. After the fieldtrip has taken place, each group gives a final presentation on one of the four research projects they conducted in New York, and this presentation is given a formal mark. In addition to giving an assessed group presentation, students are required to submit two pieces of individual work after the fieldtrip has taken place. These consist of a personal research journal and an assignment that since 2006-7 has been termed a 'visual report'. It is specifically with the latter that my intervention is concerned.

Summary of module details

Title: Human Geography Fieldwork
Semester: 2
Contact hours: One week in the field and up to 10 sessions of preparatory and post-fieldwork lectures or workshops
Number of staff: 5
Credits: 20
Assessment: 100% coursework (a combination of individual assignments and group work)
No. of students registered in 2006-7: 50
No. of students registered in 2007-8: 40

The learning outcomes for the fieldwork module state that, by the end of the course, students should be able to:

- critically discuss the significance of geographical variation and context with respect to a range of social, economic, political and cultural processes.
- demonstrate competence in a range of data collection techniques, which may include observation, interviewing, ethnography, questionnaire surveys, archival inquiry and/or textual analysis.
• work effectively in a team context.
• apply concepts and ideas from reading and lecture notes to the discussion and analysis of empirical data.
• communicate research findings through both written reports and oral presentation.

As these intended outcomes indicate, the module is concerned, amongst other things, with developing students' skills in the collection of different kinds of primary data, as well as their skills in analysing that data and presenting their findings. These outcomes set the fieldwork module apart from most other courses, as the majority of classroom-based modules do not provide students with the same level of opportunity to gain direct experience in using a variety of geographical data collection techniques or of analysing a diverse range of data. If assessment for the fieldwork course is to be successfully aligned with the stated learning outcomes, then it is clearly important that the assignments allow students to develop and evidence the kinds of skills to which these outcomes refer.

Making fieldwork visual

When I first contributed to the fieldwork module in 2005-6, students were required, for one element of their assessment, to submit a 2000-word individual report (worth 30% of the total mark for the course) on one of the full-day or half-day projects that were carried out in New York. Because students were asked to report on one of the projects in which they had participated during the fieldtrip, the original format of this assignment did allow those students to critically discuss a variety of research methods that they had carried out such as interviews, textual analysis and observation.

3 Like Hussey and Smith (2002), I would argue that learning outcomes have to be used with great caution and, in particular, that it is not possible to treat them as precise and objective descriptors. While they are useful as general descriptors of the types of skills and knowledge that students are expected to acquire in taking a particular course, they cannot meaningfully convey at the outset of a course the quality of the skills and knowledge that are desired. An understanding of what constitutes, say, competent critical skills in the interpretation of a visual image can only be acquired through experience - namely, by the process of learning that takes place as the course progresses. Thus, although this report discusses the alignment of assessment with 'learning outcomes', I use them in the qualified way discussed by Hussey and Smith rather than considering them precise descriptors.
In this sense, the assignment in its old format was at least partially aligned with the intended learning outcomes. In addition, the evaluation of students' skills in presenting varied forms of data that are collected or created in the field - such as maps, photographs or illustrations - was included in the assessment criteria grid for the individual report. Nevertheless, students were not explicitly encouraged to incorporate a variety of data sources into their report or to analyse them critically, and consequently most reports used data such as maps and photographs in a fairly limited and predominantly descriptive way. In other words, rather than providing a principal focus for critical discussion, such data was mainly used by students for the purposes of illustration and for enhancing the way in which the report was presented.

In contributing to the planning of the fieldwork teaching for 2006-7, I suggested that students should be asked to use and critically discuss visual materials such as photographs, sketches and maps as a compulsory part of their individual reports on particular research projects. After all, students have access to an abundant array of visual sources in New York that are relevant to the fieldwork projects, not only in terms of the possibilities for photography, but also in terms of materials such as leaflets, brochures, maps and postcards. By being asked to incorporate such materials into their reports and reflect on them critically, they would arguably be able to provide evidence in a more immediate and fully developed manner of their skills in collecting and analysing an important type of geographical data.

Although I do not intend to discuss this in detail because it is above all specific to the content of my discipline rather than to broader pedagogical issues, I feel it is nevertheless relevant to point out that critical image-based research - at one time fairly marginal to human geography - has in recent decades received considerable attention from academic geographers, resulting in the publication of an array of journal articles and books as well as of textbooks aimed specifically at a student audience (see e.g. Bartram, 2003; Latham, 2003; Rose, 2001 and 2003). The growing interest in visual methodologies in human geography is reflected, moreover, in the subject-specific pedagogic literature, as two recent articles on fieldwork in the Journal of Geography in Higher Education focus on how photography can be used in order to foster students' critical engagement with their field locations as well
as with the processes of geographical knowledge production that field research involves (Latham and McCormack, 2007; Sidaway, 2002).

Sidaway (2002, page 100) observes that photography has the obvious advantage of being a medium that the majority of students are already familiar with, but it also encourages them to reflect on the complex politics surrounding practices of representation by being asked to engage actively with the practical processes of creating, selecting and interpreting a set of images. In addition, he suggests,

"when they later come across (seemingly abstract or philosophical) issues of representation in lectures and readings", the use of photography in undergraduate fieldwork projects can offer "prior demonstration of the everyday practical nature of seemingly theoretical concerns." (Sidaway, 2002, page 100)

Although the details of my own intervention differed somewhat from the photography project described by Sidaway, it was largely inspired and informed by his paper.

**Introducing visual elements into the individual report, 2006-7**

Following my suggestions, the individual report was modified in 2006-7 to include a compulsory visual element. As a guideline, it was suggested that students incorporate between four and six visual images into their report, and they were given the option of using any kind of visual materials provided they were obtained or created during the fieldtrip. In order to ensure that students did not use images copied from the Internet or elsewhere after their return to the UK, they were asked to submit negatives or a CD of any photographs that they had taken in New York and included in their reports.4

I was aware, however, that it would not be sufficient simply to instruct students to incorporate relevant visual materials into their reports and critically

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4 This idea was obtained from Sidaway's (2002) discussion of using image-based research as part of a human geography field course in Barcelona.
Given that most students would have had very limited prior experience of collecting and critically analysing visual data, I decided (with my colleagues' approval) to give an additional pre-fieldtrip lecture entitled 'Making fieldwork visual'. The lecture sought to introduce recent critical approaches to the interpretation of visual materials, and also incorporated a discussion exercise (about 15 minutes) in which pairs of students were asked to study two postcard images and think about the ideas that they convey, and the messages that their creators perhaps intended them to convey (see Appendix 3.2 for a copy of the Powerpoint lecture slides).

In selecting visual materials for this exercise, and indeed for the lecture more generally, I predominantly chose to use images not specifically related to New York, because I felt that this would help students to focus their attention on the interpretative issues rather than on the details of particular places at their fieldtrip destination. In addition, the lecture was aimed at encouraging students to think reflexively and critically about their own practices in creating visual images, above all by means of photography, and also sought to address important ethical issues as well as to clarify how their use of visual images in the individual report would be assessed.

Although I had prepared the lecture very carefully, I did not feel that I succeeded in conveying the ideas I talked about with as much clarity as I would have wished, although the observation notes for this lecture supplied by Dr Michael Woods suggest that the lecture conveyed these ideas quite successfully (see portfolio section on teaching observations). Nevertheless, the short discussion exercise worked fairly well, and students were willing to engage actively in expressing their views about the postcard images, both to each other and to me when I requested feedback at the end of the activity.

In addition to the lecture presentation and discussion exercise, I gave students a detailed handout that provided guidelines and suggestions on their use of visual materials in the individual report and that sought to answer questions and doubts that I felt might arise in relation to the purpose of using visual images, to how they should be presented and to the types of visual materials that could be used (see Appendix 3.3) I was careful to emphasise

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5 The importance of briefing students in order for the use of critical visual methods to work well is emphasised by Sidaway (2002, page 100).
that their reports would not be assessed for evidence of technical ability in taking photographs or producing other kinds of visual images, but rather that they would be evaluated on the basis of the critical insights and connections made between the images and the project under discussion.

How successful did this intervention prove to be in allowing students to provide evidence of their skills in data collection and analysis? Below I firstly discuss the individual reports submitted by students in 2007 and then examine student responses to the module evaluation questionnaire, which was modified to include questions on the individual report.

The individual report and student feedback

In writing their individual reports, students selected one of the following titles:

- "The memorialisation of 9/11 at Ground Zero and the contribution of the redevelopment of the World Trade Center site to the landscape of power of Lower Manhattan."
- "With reference to your visits to Central Park and East Village, discuss the different ways in which nature is present in New York City and the different ways in which residents seek to engage with nature through these spaces."
- "In the book Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada (1991) Kay Anderson argues that "Chinatown" is a Western construction, illustrative of a process of cultural domination that gave European settlers in North America the power to define and shape the district according to their own images and interest. Using your own data from fieldwork at these "ethnic neighbourhoods", discuss the extent to which this process remains ongoing."
- Critically evaluate the ways in which the [insert name of your group's museum/gallery] presents geographical and historical knowledge to the public."

In order to deal with this issue, Sidaway (2002) reports that all his fieldtrip students were issued with disposable cameras, thereby eliminating the potential advantages that certain students with better cameras might have. For reasons of cost, however, and also because students on the New York fieldtrip were given the option of using a range of visual materials, this approach was not adopted.
Overall, the quality of individual reports was encouraging. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the focus of the pre-fieldtrip lecture on visual methodologies coupled with practical considerations, most students used photographs rather than other types of visual materials in their reports. The table below shows the distribution of marks for the individual report, and includes the mark distribution for other assessment elements by way of comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment task</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Upper second</th>
<th>Lower second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fail</th>
<th>No. of candidates</th>
<th>Mark range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-trip essay</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0-78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual report</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldwork diary</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table illustrates, students' marks for the individual report are comparable to those awarded for the other elements of assessment. A minority of students at the lowest end of the marking scale made only negligible use of visual data in their reports, or used images taken from Internet sources rather than data collected on the fieldtrip. The majority, however, successfully integrated visual data into their report, and complied with the request that they use materials collected or created in New York.

While those students who gained marks in the 2:2 and borderline 2:1 ranges incorporated images into their reports in a predominantly illustrative way, a very significant proportion of students in the 2:1 range succeeded in using at least some of their chosen images in a manner that involved critical reflection relevant to their chosen title. 16% of students gained first class marks for the report, and some of these students not only provided evidence of relevant critical reflection about the images, but also of critical reflection about their own practices of representation in creating and selecting visual data (See Appendix 3.4 for examples of extracts from students' reports). Students' choice of report title does not appear to have played a significant factor in influencing their mark, as there is a fairly even distribution of topics
across the various grade categories. The third title, however, perhaps due to its length, was very unpopular and selected by only a handful of students.

Although not all students succeeded in engaging critically with their chosen images, there is little doubt that the introduction of a visual element into the assignment allowed them to provide clearer and more direct evidence of their skills in collecting geographical data in the field, and in producing reports that were more firmly based on primary research. In past years, the strongest students took the initiative to incorporate visual materials into their reports without being prompted, but by making this element compulsory, a far wider range of students, including the academically weaker ones, produced reports that provided clear evidence of data collection and (to a lesser extent) analysis.

But how was the assignment - and specifically the visual methodologies element - perceived by the students? Below I have summarised student responses to three questions relating to this element that were included in the module evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix 3.5 for a sample questionnaire).

1) How clearly was the visual methodologies element of the fieldwork explained?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very clearly</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Not clearly at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of student responses:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Do you feel that you were able to collect relevant visual materials for your individual report?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3) Do you feel that the visual methodologies element enhanced your overall understanding of the topic you selected for your visual report?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes, very much so</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>No, not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of student responses:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses show that, overall, the introduction of a visual element into the individual report was well received by students. A significant majority felt that it was both quite clearly explained and beneficial to their overall understanding of the topic that they had chosen to write about. In addition, the majority were confident that they had been able to gather relevant visual materials to include in their report. As such, it appears that students found the visual dimension intellectually rewarding and also enjoyable, and this is also reflected in the care that most students took in terms of selecting and integrating visual sources into their assignments. As one might expect, the small minority who did not feel that they had been able to collect relevant materials were not of the opinion that the visual methodologies element had aided their understanding of their chosen topic. (As the questionnaires were completed anonymously it is not possible to determine whether those students who responded negatively also received a low mark in their assignments). 8

The predominantly positive student perception of the visual methodologies, together with the generally good standard of the reports, suggested that the modification of the assignment to include a visual element was a successful exercise in terms of helping students to achieve and evidence the learning outcomes discussed above, and one that was worth repeating in future years. Nevertheless, I felt that there was still considerable room for improving the way in which the visual methodologies theme was

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7 Similarly positive student responses are reported by Latham and McCormack (2007) and by Sidaway (2002).

8 At the time of filling in the questionnaires, students had not yet been given their marks for the individual reports, so this was not an influencing factor in terms of student responses.
introduced, given that many students, particularly those who obtained a borderline 2:1 mark or lower, had mainly used visual data in an illustrative manner. In other words, while many of these students had successfully demonstrated their ability to collect relevant geographical data and discuss it in a descriptive way, they had been less successful in showing evidence of skills in critical analysis.

Consequently, my original intention was to repeat the pre-fieldtrip visual methodologies lecture in a way that would provide students with greater scope for practising the collection and analysis of visual materials before going to New York. Instead of giving a two-hour lecture that incorporates a short class-based exercise, I envisaged setting up a workshop in which student groups would present and discuss visual materials that they had collected in Aberystwyth prior to the session. The intended purpose was to encourage students to think in a more in-depth, analytical way about visual materials as well as about their own practices of representation, not only by giving them more time for discussion, but also by asking them to collect their own visual data for the purposes of the workshop.

However, due to overall changes in the format of the fieldwork module as described above, it was not possible to carry this out. The new research-led approach requires students to devise and present research proposals in four consecutive workshops prior to the fieldtrip and, as such, is already very demanding for students in terms of workload and time commitment. It would therefore have been unreasonable to require students to prepare a fifth set of presentations (or prepare work in another format) for a fifth pre-fieldtrip workshop. Despite these unanticipated changes, however, the visual element of the assessed work for the module has been preserved. Below I discuss the format in which it has been incorporated into the module in the current academic year, and the ways in which I dealt with the problem of not being able to include a dedicated pre-fieldtrip session on visual methodologies.

**The visual report 2007-8**

As the heading suggests, the 'individual report' to which I refer above was renamed 'visual report' in the current academic year. This change was not merely cosmetic but was intended to clarify the purpose of the post-fieldtrip
individual assignment. Although - as the questionnaire feedback shows - the majority of students in 2006-7 thought the assignment was clearly explained, a number of students nevertheless voiced concerns about how much of the report should be dedicated to the discussion of visual materials and how much to other types of data. To resolve this ambiguity, the assignment now requires students to make the collection and analysis of visual data central to their reports, and to base it on one of the themes explored in New York. Furthermore, because the module as a whole has been redesigned to emphasise student-led research, the four pre-selected report titles have been removed, and students now create their own titles that describe whichever project they have chosen to focus on.

Because the visual methodologies lecture was removed from the pre-fieldtrip teaching schedule (and not replaced, as I had planned, by a workshop on this theme), I had to try to ensure that students were nevertheless sufficiently prepared for the assignment, and aware of the ways in which visual data and visual practices are open to critical analysis. For the introductory teaching session on the fieldwork module, I had been asked by the co-ordinator to speak to the students for twenty minutes about how their work for the module would be assessed. Within the framework of this talk on assessment, I gave a 'mini-lecture' on visual methodologies in which I outlined some of the key issues and questions that students were expected to consider when producing their visual reports (see Appendix 3.6 for a copy of the Powerpoint slides). Because the time was very limited, I could only give a very brief version of the lecture I had given the previous year, and so I made sure that the lecture slides for 2006-7 were available for students to consult on Blackboard.

In addition, I supplied students with a list of relevant readings and with a modified version of the handout that I had prepared in the previous year (see Appendix 3.7). I also tried, as much as possible, to provide students with feedback on the visual images that they used when giving the pre-fieldtrip presentations on their group projects and to encourage them to think reflexively about their choice of images and the ideas and information that they might convey.
Outcomes and comparison with 2006-7

How did the 2008 visual reports compare with the individual reports submitted in 2007? The table below summarises the distribution of marks awarded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First</th>
<th>2:1</th>
<th>2:2</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>Fail</th>
<th>No. of candidates</th>
<th>Mark range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0-76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table above indicates, a considerably higher proportion of students achieved marks within the 2:1 and First mark ranges this year than was the case in 2007, and consequently a much lower proportion fell within the 3rd and 2:2 mark ranges.

Reading through the visual reports for this year, I was strongly encouraged by the high quality of the work that students submitted. Not only did most students engage in greater depth and detail with the visual materials than they had done in the previous year, they also displayed much greater critical awareness of their own practices in creating, selecting and interpreting visual materials. In contrast to the previous year, several students included detailed sketch maps and plans in their reports as part of their visual evidence (see Appendix 3.8 for an example).

In addition, many reports showed evidence of higher levels of engagement with relevant academic literature compared to 2007, and this included literature on visual methodologies. Thus, despite my worries that the removal of the visual methodologies lecture might prove problematic, this was not in fact the case: indeed, the overall quality of the reports suggested that students were more successful this year in developing and providing evidence of their skills in collecting, analysing and interpreting geographical data in the form of visual materials. Before reflecting on the learning and teaching implications of this outcome, I will briefly discuss student feedback on the visual methodologies element of the fieldwork module.

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9 Please note: one assignment was not submitted but I have not recorded this as a fail because the reasons for non-submission are not yet known.
Out of a total of 40 students, 21 (over 50%) completed and returned a questionnaire (see Appendix 3.9 for sample questionnaires). The response rate is therefore significantly lower than last year, but nevertheless sufficient to provide a meaningful point of comparison. The same three questions about the visual methodologies dimension of the fieldwork were asked in this year’s questionnaire. I have summarised the responses in tabular form below:

How clearly was the visual methodologies element of the fieldwork explained?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very clearly</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Not clearly at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of student responses:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you feel that you were able to collect relevant visual materials for your report?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you feel that the visual methodologies element enhanced your overall understanding of the topic you selected?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Yes, very much so</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>No, not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of student responses:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the above question, the questionnaire also asked students to what extent they felt the fieldtrip had helped to develop their skills in visual analysis. Of the 20 students who provided an answer to this part of the questionnaire, 17 felt that it had helped them ‘a great deal’ and 3 said that it had helped them ‘moderately’.
Two interesting insights emerge from a comparison of this data with the responses provided by students in 2007. Firstly, compared to the previous year, fewer students on the 2008 fieldtrip felt that the visual report was clearly explained. Nevertheless, a higher proportion of this year's respondents felt that the visual methodologies element had enhanced their overall understanding of the topic they selected for their report. In addition, all students who responded this year believed that the fieldtrip had helped them to develop skills in visual analysis, either moderately or a great deal.

Without doubt, there are two key reasons that explain why this year a higher number of students felt that the visual report had not been clearly explained. Firstly, this may be attributed to the removal of the specific report titles from which students were asked to select in 2007. Inevitably, this made the assignment more challenging for students. Secondly, it can also be attributed to the removal of the full two-hour teaching session on visual methodologies. Why, in that case, were this year's students more positive overall about the extent to which the visual methodologies element had helped them to understand their chosen topic?

While this is difficult to evidence, I would suggest that it may be attributed to their more prolonged and active personal involvement in the research topics discussed in their reports. Whereas last year's students had learned about the topics on which their visual reports were based by means of lecture presentations, this year's students actively selected and designed their research projects prior to the fieldtrip.

Personal learning and implications for future teaching
The evidence that was collected for 2007 and 2008 in the form of student assignments and evaluation questionnaires shows two interesting trends: despite the fact that students did not feel that the visual report was as clearly explained this year as it was in 2007, the overall quality of the assignments was significantly higher, and students were more successful in showing evidence of their skills in data collection and analysis. Thus, despite lower
student ratings with regard to clarity of explanation, the module learning outcomes were achieved more fully in 2008\textsuperscript{10}.

What are the outcomes of this two-year intervention in terms of my own personal learning? Firstly, the development has demonstrated that the incorporation of a compulsory visual methodologies element into the fieldwork assessment provides an effective way of improving the alignment between assessment for this module and intended outcomes that focus on developing student skills in the collection and analysis of geographical data. Because students are (understandably) concerned with assessment, it is much more likely that the learning outcomes of a given course will be achieved if the assessed work effectively requires students to provide evidence of those outcomes.

As Biggs and Tang (2007, page 52) observe, the principles of constructive alignment sound obvious when they are explained by means of an empirical example. Driving instructors help their students attain the intended outcome (learning how to drive a car) by asking them to drive. Logically, the examination involves asking students to demonstrate what they have learned by carrying out this activity. Thus, if we wish students to develop and show evidence of geographical research skills, then it is evident that the course has to give them the opportunity to do research - and to be assessed in a way that allows them to evidence their skills.

The comparison of data for two consecutive years has also proved instructive with regards to my own learning. Most importantly, perhaps, it has shown that the restructuring of the module in 2008 did not, as I had feared, have a negative impact on the quality of students' visual reports. On the contrary, despite the removal of the visual methodologies lecture, the standard of the visual report assignments actually rose significantly. This, I would suggest, is a clear indication that lecture-based teaching is not an effective means of helping students to develop the skills indicated in the learning outcomes for this module.

\textsuperscript{10} I am not able at this time to supply details of students' marks for the other elements of the fieldwork module as these have not yet been finalised. However, having attended a number of the assessed group presentations that students gave yesterday (22\textsuperscript{nd} April 2008) I would suggest that the upward trend in the quality of students' visual reports is also apparent in other elements of their work for the module.
The data also shows, as I mentioned above, that if we want students to develop skills in research, the best way of going about this is by getting them to do research. Although many students found the new module format very demanding, it was clear that it provided them with far greater opportunities to develop research skills - not simply in New York, but also prior to the fieldtrip. Thirdly, the outcomes of this intervention illustrate the way in which summative assessment and teaching methods used in a given course are not two separate elements but are closely interlinked. By changing not only the nature of the assessment itself (by the incorporation of a visual methods element) but also the method of teaching and learning (from traditional lecturing to student-led research and presentations), it was possible to help students to attain the learning outcomes at a higher level, and hence obtain higher marks.

Despite this positive outcome, it is still necessary to address the fact that students did not feel that the visual report was very clearly explained. Indeed, several students e-mailed me before the submission deadline for the visual report asking for clarification of what was required (see Appendix 3.10 for a copy of one of these e-mail inquiries). I would suggest, therefore, that there is a clear need to incorporate a full pre-fieldtrip teaching session dedicated to visual methodologies. This is especially the case given that the visual report constitutes about a third of the total mark for the module. However, rather than reinstating the two-hour visual methodologies lecture presentation, I suggest that it would be appropriate to organise a workshop that would be preceded in the previous week by a brief lecture presentation.

The workshop could provide a forum for student groups to bring with them visual materials that they have created or collected locally in Aberystwyth and to present their interpretations of these materials to other groups. The creation or collection of visual materials would be focused around a particular theme that can be explored in a local context (one possible theme might be: the way in which Welsh identities are expressed and contested through the material landscape in Aberystwyth). Student groups might also

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11 Nine of the twenty-one respondents to the questionnaire felt that the amount of work undertaken for the field course was 'too much', The remaining twelve felt that it was 'about right',
ask their peers to comment on their own views and interpretations of the visual materials that they present, and this would hopefully provide an effective way of demonstrating through practice how visual images are open to diverse interpretations. It would also provide students with experience of using visual methods before they go to New York.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this report, my freedom to make substantial changes to this module is naturally restricted by the fact that I share the teaching with other colleagues and am not the coordinator for the fieldwork course. Nevertheless, I hope that, with the approval of the coordinator and my other colleagues, I will be able to incorporate a full workshop on visual methodologies in the coming academic year. My personal feeling is that this year's format - which required students to plan four separate research projects and to present proposals in four consecutive workshops - was a little too demanding (despite being more successful where students' attainment of learning outcomes is concerned), and that it would be more beneficial for students to design a more limited number of projects, perhaps two or three. This would not only give them time to develop their project proposals in greater depth, but would also make some time available for the incorporation of a visual methodologies workshop.

12 Indeed, it is clear that some students shared this view. One questionnaire respondent commented: "I felt there were too many topics to cover; I think we could have learnt more if we cut down the number of projects."