**Lecture Capture versus Lecture Napture? (Phil Race)**

Nowadays, technology has advanced to the extent where it is thought to be possible to ‘capture’ lectures. One apocryphal rumour was that ‘the University should record all lectures this year, so they wouldn’t have to be given next year’. Another is ‘if all lectures had been captured, it would be much easier to assess the teaching excellence of the institution’ and perhaps the number of lectures captured could be a TEF metric (dodging the question of how might one even start to judge the ‘excellence’ of the lectures?).

I don’t know about you, but just under half of my lectures are below my average in quality. Would I like only a few of my lectures to be captured? And how would I know which? But I try to remind myself that I don’t ‘lecture’ – or at least I try not to. I’ve always tried for what is nowadays called the ‘flipped’ agenda, involving as many of those present as I can. I’m not saying that there shouldn’t be ‘straight lectures’ – but I’d much prefer them to be called ‘talks’. I really enjoy going to a talk, and listening to a talk on the radio, or even watching a talk on TV (but there I do tend get distracted by watching the talker – though watching can be valuable in its own right). I also like going to a concert and watching and listening silently, without any two-way interaction apart from the applause. When attending a concert, I also can’t help watching the reactions of other members of the audience, as can listeners in a talk audience, and indeed a live lecture – including a ‘flipped’ one. Perhaps that’s the seed of one of my reservations of the use of ‘captured’ lectures, that they are often replayed ‘alone’ with no-one else’s reactions to compare and reflect upon. Of course it doesn’t have to be like this; captured lectures can be viewed and listened to by a group, not just an individual. But is it not the case that it’s more likely to be an ‘audience’ of one?

Would I like *any* of my lectures to be captured? I’d like to pose the question: how many of those whose lectures have been captured ever get round to watching the recordings again themselves? How many watch the whole thing, and resist skipping forward to the next bit? Now when I *have* actually gone through a whole ‘captured’ lecture of mine, it has been an intensely developmental (and without exception uncomfortable) experience. I’ve been able to learn all sorts of things about what I did that didn’t work, and what I could do differently or better on another similar occasion. Indeed, it’s even better to watch one’s own performances with a few friends, from whom on can draw some comfort and reassurance. It’s much more comfortable to watch *others’* captured lectures; I’ve learned a lot from this, but I only tend to do this when they’ve asked me for feedback so I’m watching with a purpose. I admit that students may watch recorded lectures with a purpose, such as to see *again* how the important difficult concept was introduced, but suspect that this doesn’t happen as often as might be wished.

Back to the curriculum. Are lectures the heart of the curriculum, or should it be learning? Students often think that lectures are the backbone of a module or course. But that means if they think ‘OK, I’ve *got* all the lectures on my machine’, does this means that they’ve learned? I’m sure people are busy researching how many captured lectures students actually use, and which students (high fliers, low fliers, strategic students, disinterested students, passionate students….) actually make real use of captured lectures. Long before the advent of lecture capture, Donald Bligh published his book ‘What’s the use of lectures?’ which reached several editions over the decades. Large-group shared learning experiences can be invaluable, (surely that’s what ‘lecture’ slots are for?) and well worth the time spent by all parties, but that doesn’t mean they can realistically be ‘captured’; only ghosts of them tend to survive recording, and re-viewing.

My title for this piece: ‘Lecture Capture versus Lecture Napture?’ is quite deliberate. Lectures can induce sleep. Lecture rooms can be warm and comfortable, and the tendency for sleep increases while sitting still and when the lights are dimmed so the screen can be seen better. Who has never nodded off in a lecture? Who has never witnessed fellow audience members do so? More importantly, who has never drifted off into a world of their own (sometimes highly creatively) during a lecture? When there’s a Twitter feed live during a lecture, the tendency to nod off is surely reduced? And with the Twitter feed, at least the feedback has been ‘captured’, even if the lecture isn’t being recorded. But ‘capturing’ lectures can increase the temptation for ‘napture’. Students can think to themselves ‘I won’t concentrate on this just now, I’ll have another chance to think about it later when I look at the recording’, and can have a mental rest anytime they wish. Also of course, some students can decide to remain asleep rather than coming along to the lecture, in the full and certain knowledge that they will be able to look at the replay later. This ‘not coming along’ behaviour is further encouraged by the endemic availability on websites of slides, and accompanying resource materials – even in advance would you believe! Now should all the learning that can be achieved be fulfilled by just the slides and materials, so be it – and why bother with the lecture at all, let alone capture it when it happens?

I know there are institutional policies about things being place on the web in advance of a lecture, and things being made available after the lecture (including the recording perhaps), but I argue that what’s available on the web should not *just* be ‘the lecture and its slides’, but (better) questions to think about before coming along, things to read beforehand, decisions to make beforehand so that debate can take place, and a long list more of useful adjuncts, including matters arising at the lecture itself, as well as follow-up questions of things to take forward after being at the event. Many such institutional policies are in my opinion unwise and misguided. I know all the arguments about ‘those with special needs’ and respect these, but in my own experience it’s best to offer each individual with such needs tailored help after a dialogue with them individually, including the question ‘what can I best do to help you get the most out of these lectures?’. Blanket policies largely respond badly to individual needs.

Yes, the technology has become much better, but have we got better at *using* it for ‘lecture capture’? If it’s a case of a fixed camera on the podium, that only captures a little of a good live session. The voices from the audience asking questions can be lost. The facial expression of the audience members may not be captured (except perhaps the keen students who tend to inhabit the front row or two). And think of it: when while watching something on TV, DVD or in a cinema does the camera shot and focus stay the same for best part of an hour? How soon would we switch off or walk out? If the visual quality of ‘captured lectures’ is less than the excellent broadcasting standards we’re accustomed to, won’t viewers’ perception of the quality of the content of the occasion itself be severely compromised?

If it’s only the podium and screen being captured, are we imprisoned on the spot? Are we threatened by ‘scratching one’s nose while the students are doing a task’ being recorded for posterity? Are we scared stiff of getting something wrong? In practice, students often learn a lot, and respect us all the more, for getting things wrong then putting ourselves right – that’s what *they* do when they learn new things. Live occasions work best with spontaneity. Cameras can kill this.

Live interactive events *can* be captured quite well, with several cameras, and several people operating them, scanning from point to point during the occasion, focusing on those asking questions, and their faces as we respond to them and so on. A versatile editing desk is needed, such as used when televising recordings of concerts, when after the event the products of the various cameras can be synced so that the most interesting things are seamlessly presented on screen.

Have you ever sat in an ‘overflow’ room when the main venue was full? Is it the same as being in the primary location? Hardly. If it’s a ‘great’ occasion, there’s something about being in the same room and ‘breathing the same air’ as everyone else present.

While I’ve been writing the first draft of this piece, after announcing my intention in a Tweet, I’ve had several valuable contributions on Twitter, and would like to thank Sharon Flynn, Ed Dev team at QMUL, Steve Bentley, Santanu Vasant, Simon Thomson, FionaG, Sarah Channon, Katherine Haxton for responding to me. Their comments and questions include (not in that order):

‘Once heard Lecture Capture referred to as "time travel", replay the lecture, valuable revision tool, can be repeated’.

‘Top down imposition of lecture capture imminent here. I'm fairly positive, might encourage more interactivity, adding value to attending rather than watching video. May be stepping stone to flipping if people question value of live vs video’.

‘Yes, this is a common practice, to check if students have attended lectures, but is this good for deeper learning?’

‘Marked a batch of exam papers a few years ago in which about 75% contained at least one phrase taken straight from the lecture! Citing it as a bad practice...I don't think anyone would want to encourage that! It's plagiarism too’.

‘Useful tool for students to review challenging aspects of course versus ‘binge viewing box set mentality’ active vs passive study.

‘Pay per view???’ [now *there’s* a TEF metric? Ed.]

‘Capture of lectures for cohorts on campus can free up contact time for block release cohorts to complete practical work & seminars. Can also support flipped classroom for future cohorts, particularly if recorded as shorter knowledge nuggets!’

Lecture capture: ‘Nuggets’ yes, absolutely, by all means. But surely not ‘quarters of an hour’ or worse?

(29th April 2016)