

Evaluating Interactive Fieldcasts for Enhancing Access to Fieldwork

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Aim: To carry out a detailed evaluation of live, interactive fieldcasts in the context of more traditional approaches to fieldwork delivery.

Context

Fieldwork is a fundamental part of the curriculum in undergraduate biological, environmental, Earth and geographical sciences, but not all students are able to participate in authentic field activities. The nature of online and distance learning means that these students are more likely to find fieldwork problematic.

Undergraduate students studying S206 Environmental Science at the OU are given the chance to attend non-compulsory field-days with a tutor as part of the module. In 2016, we designed and delivered a series of interactive live fieldcasts to support students who could not attend the S206/SXF206 tutor-organised field-trips.

- Deliver a series of fieldcasts using the same approach as in 2016 and ensure participants attend both the fieldcasts and tutor-organised trips.
- Assess participants' backgrounds prior to activities with a preliminary questionnaire, and evaluate responses in semi-structured questionnaires and unstructured interviews after the fieldcasts and tutor-organised trips.
- Conduct a quantitative and qualitative analysis of responses to understand how students and tutors engage with both types of activity, their perceptions of each and their ideas on their use.

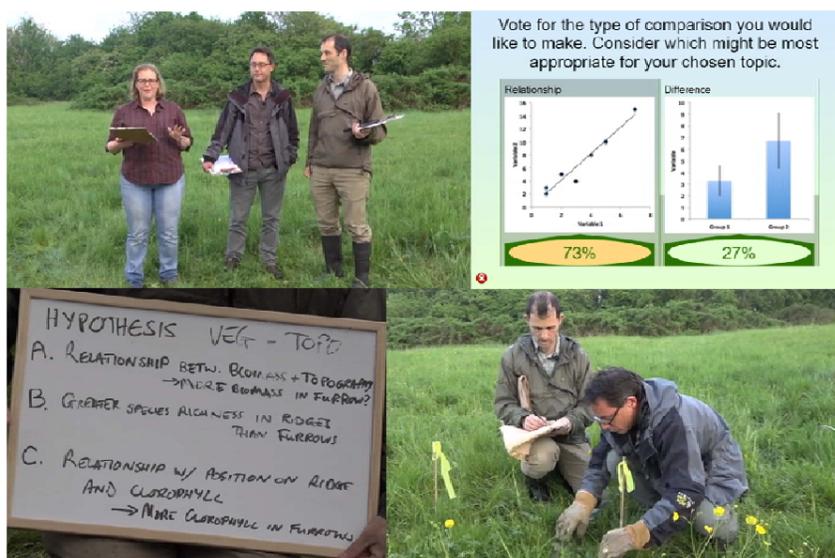


Figure 1. Images from the fieldcasts

Through the OU's Stadium Live system, students used interactive widgets to make observations, generate hypotheses and design a field investigation, which was carried out and analysed live by the teaching team.

Approach

We propose to gather student and tutor experiences and reflections from participation in both tutor-organised field trips and live fieldcasts to build up an understanding of the potential value of fieldcasts in the context of more traditional modes of delivery.

Specifically we will:

- Recruit a group of 20 students and 5 tutors to participate in our study.



Outcomes

We hope to better understand how interactive fieldcasts can be used to support, enhance and widen access to authentic fieldwork experiences. We plan to use the knowledge we generate to improve our practice of live fieldcasting and understand how this tool can be deployed in other contexts within the OU and beyond. We will disseminate our findings through presentations at the OU, at external conferences in our disciplines and through a publication in the pedagogical literature.