Research article

The podcast as a means to approach Cultural Studies and American cinema

El podcast como medio de acercamiento a los Estudios Culturales y al cine estadounidense

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Abstract

Introduction: Digital platforms have altered the way we watch TV and films. In a similar way, the podcast has become a popular medium in mainstream media. By working with both, this project is expected to motivate students to approach Cultural Studies through American cinema. **Methodology:** The method for teaching in class will be the experiential learning method, more precisely the method designed by David Kolb. **Discussions:** The main challenges this project poses focus on not mistaking its goal with delivering masterclasses in Cultural Studies and filmmaking and on ensuring that the members of each group collaborate in a fair and equitable manner. **Conclusions:** This project is expected to help students improve their critical thinking skills and stimulate their interest in Cultural Studies and the potential of popular culture.

Keywords: cultural studies; American cinema; popular culture; experiential learning method; critical thinking; film studies; podcast; higher education.

Resumen

Introducción: La forma de consumir cine y televisión ha cambiado gracias a las plataformas digitales. Del mismo modo, el podcast se ha convertido en un exitoso método de comunicación de masas. Aunando ambos elementos, este proyecto espera motivar al alumnado a acercarse a los Estudios Culturales a través del cine estadounidense. **Metodología:** Durante las clases se empleará el método de aprendizaje experiencial, centrándose sobre todo en el modelo diseñado por David Kolb. **Discusión:** Los retos principales que plantea este proyecto se centran en no confundir su desarrollo con la impartición de clases magistrales sobre Estudios Culturales y cine, y en garantizar que los miembros de un mismo grupo colaboren de forma justa y equitativa. **Conclusiones:** A través de este proyecto se espera que el alumnado mejore su capacidad de pensamiento crítico, y despertar su interés por los Estudios Culturales y el potencial de la cultura popular.

Palabras clave: estudios culturales; cine estadounidense; cultura popular; método de aprendizaje experiencial; pensamiento crítico; estudios de cine; podcast; educación superior.

1. Introduction

In the recent decades of the 21st century, streaming platforms such as Netflix, HBO, and Amazon Prime, among many others, have turned TV series and films into easily accessible products. Immediate availability, a wide collection, and the possibility to watch content at each individual user's pace are some of the main factors that have contributed to their unquestionable success. Young university students are familiar with this way of consuming content; the digital world has become a natural environment for many, if not most of them. By taking advantage of their own digital savviness, students will have the opportunity to put these skills to good use and delve deeper into film and Cultural Studies.

Their venture into these fields will take the form of a podcast episode with a fixed format, as if it were part of a larger film podcast production. This approach is aimed at undergraduate university students of English Studies—both native and non-native English speakers—who are interested in American cinema and American popular culture and are enrolled in subjects and/or courses related to these topics. This activity should account for at least 30% of their overall grade as it requires a significant amount of time and effort. Nonetheless, lecturers are free to set the percentage for this task.

According to Cox et al., recent research has shown podcasting to be effective for both scholarly research and dissemination, as well as a medium that offers a more accessible way to learn and foster creativity (Cox et al., 2023, p. 5). Thus, by requiring students to present their work in spoken words rather than written essays, they will access the unfamiliar academic world of research via a familiar means, namely the digital world:
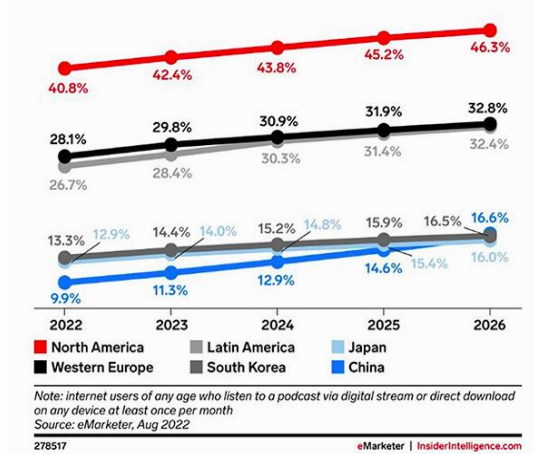
> Podcasts are audio media, sometimes with video accompaniment, featuring verbal communications in a variety of formats and styles, often produced with little administrative oversight and few barriers to entry. … Recent work in the field of critical podcast studies has shown that podcasting can be both a scholarly research tool and a method of dissemination that doesn't require a written text to establish rigor. … Podcast studies are examining what it means to have a voice and be heard, particularly with respect to openness, equality, and diversity.

Once their project has been completed, students should be allowed to share their research and findings on any digital platforms of their choice—including the websites of their academic institutions—without having to limit their target audience to academic listeners.

Divulging their creations and conclusions also means that they are contributing toward making culture accessible and affordable to anyone who is willing to listen, consequently taking advantage of the global growth that podcast consumption is expected to experience as shown in Figure 1 (Sullivan, 2024, pp. 47-48). It is worth noting, too, that their contributions will become part of the changes podcasting has brought about in academia and research, which have the potential to disrupt the "too often unquestioned, practices of scholarship" (Beckstead et al., 2024, p. 35).

Figure 1.

Podcast listeners worldwide, by region/country, 2022-26 (percentage of internet users)

Source: *Podcasting in a Platform Age: From an Amateur to a Professional Medium* (Sullivan, 2024, p. 48).

2. Objectives

The aim of this approach is to introduce university students to Cultural Studies by analyzing films produced within American popular culture. Hence, the focus is first and foremost on providing students with the possibility to begin working with said academic discipline by putting it into practice rather than using its complicated theoretical framework as a starting point.

It is precisely because students are not receiving traditional—and often overwhelming—theoretical lectures to understand the purpose of Cultural Studies that they may be more willing to work with it and critically think within the framework they have chosen for their analysis, such as feminism, postcolonialism, masculinities, etc., just to name a few. Bill Green and Andrew Hickey address the impact of Cultural Studies on university and secondary school education in the following terms:

> Beyond questions of schooling, prevailing accounts of Cultural Studies and Education often also draw attention to the liberatory capacity that Cultural Studies' theoretical, conceptual and methodological resources present to Education. Claims regarding the critical capacity that Cultural Studies provides for the analysis of, for instance, popular culture in the classroom and beyond, the negotiation of social power, and explications of identity and questions of positionality, work alongside specific applications of methodological technique that emphasize discursive, textualist and ethnographic approaches to inquiry. (Green & Hickey, 2022, p. 635).

Working with American cinema—and by extension American popular culture—enables students to explore the reach of a cultural product beyond its artistic value. As a result, they will need to put their critical thinking skills into practice in order to come up with alternative ways to approach the film they will be analyzing. In this paper, I will outline both how to present this project to students and how to conduct the analysis itself.

The podcast is intended to serve as a bridge between the academic world and students who are navigating their first experience in higher education. By showing them that they can participate in research without having to be part of the academic community and its *status quo*, this approach will make them feel more at ease when it comes to sharing their ideas with peers and lecturers alike. Furthermore, the effort that is required to create the podcast episode demands that they understand and process the resources they are working with both as individuals and as a team.

This approach also strives to give students an opportunity to strengthen their teamwork and individual work skills. The podcast requires students to collaborate and make decisions as a group while also remaining aware of the importance and impact of their own independent efforts on the final product—it is not a coincidence that the podcast is divided into individual, yet connected, analyses and a debate that involves all members.

Furthermore, this project will allow lecturers to gain a better understanding of how their students experience the world and society they live in. More often than not, there is a generational divide between lecturers and students that is not always easy to bridge, especially now that advances in technology have changed the way we communicate with each other.

The classroom is the space where students can interact face-to-face with one another and their lecturer. In this context, communication needs to take center stage so that students feel comfortable enough expressing themselves and being heard, which is another objective of this approach.

Rather than delivering masterclass after masterclass in filmmaking and Cultural Studies, the lecturer should focus on creating and fostering an environment in which there is constant feedback and brainstorming, leading to productive and constructive discussions where students learn both new information and are compelled to question some of their beliefs and/or assumptions.

3. Theoretical framework

Cultural Studies will be the theoretical framework for this approach. However, rather than working with this discipline from a theoretical perspective, students will be introduced to this field through practice. The lecturer will guide students through their initial contact with said discipline by narrowing down the scope of its application to a specific aspect or aspects that can be found within the scene of a film.

One of the main objectives of this approach is to assist students with developing "cultural studies sensibility" (Ang, 2020, p. 286)[1]. Working with American films is intended to demonstrate to students that even popular culture can be examined as an agent of social

manipulation and meaning making (Hermes & Teurlings, 2021, pp. 228-229)[2]. In fact, no expression of culture is beyond the scope of Cultural Studies as "cultural studies scholarship can roam across the whole landscape of the contemporary world, focusing on any particular issue or topic deemed relevant at a given time and place" (Ang, 2020, p. 286). As a result, filmmaking is no longer being regarded as an art form that only the academic and artistic elite can access.

Instead, it is stripped of its elevated artistic qualities and placed in an arena where "'culture' (or rather, 'the cultural') is not a distinct object of study, but functions as an 'inexhaustible, fluid and sprawling category', the terrain for multiple and endlessly proliferating and changing sites of struggle over signification" (Ang, 2020, p. 287).

As Lawrence Grossberg puts it, Cultural Studies tries to address the obvious in different ways in order to problematize what we take for granted along with its contexts and temporalities, indeed "[i]t seeks not merely to make the invisible visible, to give voice to the unsaid and silenced, but to create the conditions for understanding why and how the world continues to be made in such (inhumane) ways" (Grossberg, 2019, p. 25).

4. Methodology

This approach attempts to follow Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). As explained by Basak Durgun in her chapter titled "'Bringing the World to the Classroom': Cultural Studies and Experiential Learning" (2019), this concept originated in John Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1963) where Dewey regards the "experiential continuum" as:

> [the] crucial element of learning by doing, against a singular experience without an opportunity to expand. … The principle of continuity encourages positive growth with opportunities for future expansion of skills and knowledge, rather than static, disconnected habits. According to Dewey …, the role of educators is to create the conditions that make continuous and interactive growth possible. (Durgun, 2019, p. 157).

Durgun alludes to other foundational figures of this type of learning, such as David Kolb, whose four-step approach to ELT I shall follow.

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[1] Ien Ang describes cultural studies sensibility as "a particular understanding of how we can best 'know' culture and the world: that the world operates through the intricate entanglements of active meaning-making and power relations; that 'culture' is an ongoing social process through which whole ways of life are constructed and reconstructed; that we can only understand 'what's going on' by analyzing practices in their complex contexts, and so on" (Ang, 2020, p. 286).

[2] Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin regard mass media, which needless to say includes film, as potentially "the most pervasive of ISAs [Ideological State apparatuses] (at least in the past century)" (2021, p. 12).

According to Kolb's theory, the first step ("concrete experience") consists in allowing learners to use their senses and perceptions to engage with what is being presented; the next step ("reflective observation") requires learners to establish a connection between feelings and the ideas that said experience has elicited; the third step ("abstract conceptualization") focuses on giving learners the opportunity to arrive to conclusions, theories, and/or principles so they can subsequently test them; the last and fourth step ("active experimentation") involves learners testing their theory(ies), this will lead to new learning which can be applied to obtain feedback and move onto creating the next experience (What is Experiential Learning?, 2024).

Figure 2.

The experiential learning cycle

Source: "What is Experiential Learning?" (2024).

David Kolb's theory of experiential learning also takes into account different learning styles, where the "balancing style" is placed at the center. Surrounding this style, Kolb identifies eight more: experiencing, imagining, reflecting, analyzing, thinking, deciding, acting, and initiating ("What is Experiential Learning?", 2024). Kolb's model "defines learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' … and reflects the influence of Piaget, Lewin, Dewey, and Jung" (Manolis et al., 2013, p. 45)[3]. Therefore, Kolb's model allows for flexible learning that attempts to welcome different types of learners rather than force a unique learning style onto them.

Figure 3.

The experiential learning styles

Source: "What is Experiential Learning?" (2024).

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[3] To define learning according to Kolb, the authors quote Deryakulu *et al*.'s paper, "Predictors of Academic Achievement of Student ICT Teachers with Different Learning Styles" (2009, p. 703).

Furthermore, according to Riebe et al.'s review of fifty-seven articles—published between 1965 and 2015 containing reports from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Eastern Europe, and China—on teamwork pedagogy in higher education, "over one third" of these articles regarded experiential learning, among others, as essential to teamwork pedagogy (Riebe et al., 2016, p. 631). Since the podcast project has teamwork as one of its essential elements, it makes sense that experiential learning serves as the methodology for this approach to Cultural Studies and American cinema.

4.1. Development of the sessions throughout the course and instructions for the making and recording of the podcast episode

Students shall be provided with materials to work with both during sessions in the classroom and independently. These materials will be made available on their course or subject website, depending on how virtual learning is managed in their respective academic institutions. The first two sessions of the course must focus on teaching students about the basic terminology of film language, how lighting works, and the way sound and music are also essential elements when analyzing a scene. The purpose of these two sessions is to introduce students to the aforementioned aspects of filmmaking. Their knowledge and understanding will improve throughout the course as they analyze several scenes from different films in class.

The podcast episode will be created and recorded by groups of three to five students. The students will be in charge of creating their own groups. The lecturer may help with this task by working as a liaison between students who are struggling to find a team and those who are looking for additional members to complete theirs.

This way, if there are students in the class who are hesitant to ask others whether they can join their team, they can always rely on the lecturer to assist them with solving this issue. Once the teams have been formed, the members must select the film they will work with. When this decision has been made, the group must make arrangements to meet and watch the film together. This will allow them to have an informed discussion about which scene from the film they will choose and analyze for their project.

Teams should make use of technology to keep in touch regularly throughout the process of creating the podcast, apps such as Slack and/or even basic messaging ones such as WhatsApp will be useful in this case[4]. Additionally, teams must set up two different types of schedules: one to arrange meetings, preferably in person rather than through videocall, and another to set deadlines for their individual work. In terms of sharing their individual contributions, each team will create a shared folder on a platform such as Google Drive, iCloud, or any other of their choice.

As a deadline approaches, each member will upload whatever material is required. These deadlines should be followed by a meeting that all the members must attend having already revised the material that their teammates uploaded to the shared folder. This aspect is crucial, as each member's independent contributions must form a cohesive analysis that has a coherent structure and development. In addition, the lecturer must hold one or two meetings with the groups throughout the course in order to monitor their progress and resolve any doubts that may arise. The podcast episode should not be longer than twenty minutes or shorter than fifteen. All the groups must comply with these instructions.

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[4] It should be considered that users of Slack can choose to hide their phone number and personal information. However, this is not the case with WhatsApp or other messaging apps. Each team should be free to decide what the best and most efficient way to communicate is.

In terms of the sections into which the recording will be divided, the instructions are as follows: first, the students will create an introduction for their podcast, announcing it as a new episode of a larger production; second, each member will state their name and very briefly summarize the main focus of their individual part of the analysis; third, each member will proceed to elaborate on their previously summarized section; and finally, all the members of the group will take part in a debate about the scene.

The debate is their opportunity to express their thoughts on what the other members have commented on, and any other points of view they did not have time to elaborate on during their own individual sections. The time allotted for each part of the podcast will be decided by the lecturer, as it will depend on the number of students in the group.

4.1.1. Resources for students

First of all, students need to learn basic film language terminology. This will be done by providing them with a glossary of film language as well as a list of textbooks on filmmaking for their own perusal, such as: *Moving Pictures: An Introduction to Cinema* (Sharman, 2020), *Film Studies: The Basics* (Villarejo, 2022), *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* (Rabiger & Hurbis-Cherrier, 2013), and *On Film-making: An Introduction to the Craft of the Director* (Mackendrick, 2006).

Students will have access to free film podcasts that have proven to be reliable and produced in a professional manner. Some that are worth sharing with them are *You Must Remember This*, a production by American film critic and journalist Karina Longworth, and *The Director's Cut*, produced by the Directors Guild of America.

In terms of recording the podcast, students will be advised that using a specific software and/or device is not mandatory. However, regardless of how they choose to do their recording, the sound quality needs to be good enough so as to avoid misunderstandings and/or confusion when the lecturer listens to and grades their podcast episode.

4.1.2. How to analyze a film in class following the Experiential Learning method

The focus of each lesson will be on showing students how to begin analyzing the scene of a film by adopting a point of view that will come from the field of Cultural Studies—for instance, the session may be focused on the evolution of the depiction of femininity in Disney classic films. The films selected for this purpose must contain female characters from Disney's most popular films that were produced in different decades—where enough time has passed for there to be a significant change—for example: *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *Frozen* (2013). The lecturer will have chosen which scenes of each production are most relevant to be analyzed in class from the aforementioned perspective.

A Q&A session will take place at the start, where the lecturer will ask the students questions that will eventually lead the class to understand what the topic at hand is[5]. Next, the students will watch each scene twice. After the first viewing, the lecturer will encourage the students to comment on the scene. Then, they will watch the scene for the second time, paying special attention to how film language and any other technical elements of filmmaking contribute to representing and portraying the aspects they discussed after the first viewing.

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[5] These questions are by no means about theoretical or academic knowledge, but rather about the students' impressions and beliefs. This point will be explained in detail later on in the paper.

As the course progresses, students should be allowed and encouraged to be the ones who start the discussions in class once they have watched the scenes they will be working with that day. Any thoughts or perspectives that students may come up with should be welcomed, shared, and discussed with their classmates and lecturer to foster initiative and critical thinking. Repetition and encouragement to take the initiative will be fundamental in giving students the necessary skills to carry out their own analysis in their respective podcast episodes.

4.1.3. Practical demonstration

Following the previous suggestion where scenes from three Disney films would be analyzed in terms of their portrayal of femininity, I will proceed to explain step by step how the session would unfold in the actual classroom by using two scenes from *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) as examples[6]: The first scene takes place in the cottage where the three fairy godmothers are preparing Aurora's—the protagonist's—birthday cake and making her a princess dress, as she will turn sixteen years old and must be told the truth about who she really is; in the second scene, Maleficent—the villain—is seen in the dark, eerie cellar of the royal castle, where she gloats and celebrates her success in casting a spell over Aurora, who lies on the floor in a deep eternal sleep after pricking her finger on a spindle.

Both scenes show very different-looking female characters in clashing settings. In the first scene the action takes place in the cozy cottage where Aurora has been protected by the fairy godmothers since she was an infant. Completely unaware of her true identity and the magical qualities of her caregivers, Aurora has spent the first sixteen years of her life in this idyllic place. On the other hand, the cellar where Maleficent is standing is made of old, rotten wooden beams, and the only sources of light come from the enchanted spindle and Maleficent's own body, which bursts into green flames in order to disappear from the room.

Before playing the first scene for the students, the lecturer will start the session by asking questions about their favorite fairy tales and stories for children, some of which may have been made into films although this is not a must. From this point onwards, the questions will become more specific as the lecturer asks the students about characters from these fairy tales that they found interesting, terrifying, beautiful, etc. The next question will be "why?"—why did they feel this way towards a certain character?

Certainly, some of their answers will allude to female characters, the lecturer should then continue to narrow the focus and start an actual discussion about these female characters and get students to dig deeper into the reasons why they liked or disliked them. The lecturer should guide this exchange towards femininity and what it means for the students, what they consider to be feminine or not and why, what experiences and beliefs might have shaped their views and how they suspect they have been constructed, what their thoughts are on feminism, and the shifts they have observed in the way women and femininity are perceived and portrayed in popular culture.

Students should be challenged on their answers by their lecturer and/or peers whenever it feels necessary. Whether there is a clear outcome or not, these Q&A sessions must always take place before watching the scenes from the film. This exercise is an opportunity to show students how bias is constructed and how they can become aware of it by starting with their own.

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[6] This practical session must take place after the first two sessions where students have been introduced to basic terminology for film language, lighting, as well as sound and music in filmmaking.

It will also show them how the culture one grows in and their environment in terms of family, friendships, social class, and schooling contribute to shaping the way they see the world and to maintaining or destabilizing power dynamics, especially when it comes to the male/female dichotomy—this is where Cultural Studies comes into action and will continue to be present until the end of this demonstration. In addition, it gives the lecturer an opportunity to get to know the students better and thus build rapport with them.

The students are now ready to start working with the scenes. The lecturer will introduce the film by explaining that they are about to watch a clip from the Disney classic *Sleeping Beauty* (1959)[7]. The students will watch the first scene; afterwards, the lecturer will ask them to give their opinion on the physical appearance of the characters and compare the fairy godmothers to Aurora's, while focusing on whether any of the characters are sexualized and explaining why and how. This should lead to the students noticing that the fairy godmothers are not sexualized while Aurora is. Her youth and beauty are highlighted by standing next to her protectors, who fit into the (now outdated) archetype of the spinster.

Next, the lecturer will ask the students to comment on the setting where the scene is taking place. Once they have answered, the lecturer will ask them to think about how the characters' physical appearances relate to the actual setting with regards to the home: the old and infertile female body that has born no children and needs magical powers to care for a child, compared to the female body that is young, fertile, and ready to leave the home to enter womanhood through marrying a stranger. Students should be encouraged to reflect on how the exchange that stemmed from the initial Q&A session—involving their thoughts on femininity—and dominating narratives of gender within society are still similar and different from the ones that can be seen in this scene, bearing in mind the film was made in 1959 in the United States. This discussion will involve students learning about popular culture in the U.S., Hollywood, and the expectations and demands placed on women of that era.

Once the previous step has been completed, it is time to watch the first scene once more. The lecturer will explain to the students that for this second viewing, they must factor in film language as well as lighting, sound and music. The purpose of this second viewing is to get students to understand the ways in which said elements work together to represent, shape and highlight different portrayals of femininity. The discussion after watching the same scene for the second time will be geared towards addressing the points that have been made during the first discussion—for instance, the students might be asked by the lecturer to think about how the type of lighting in the scene is used to depict femininity in a positive way.

Finally, after the second viewing and discussion have taken place, students will watch the second scene that has been selected from the film, where Maleficent thinks herself victorious after managing to cast the sleeping spell on Aurora by means of the spindle. This is where the lecturer takes a step back and lets the students take the lead in analyzing the scene following the same steps as in the first analysis.

The students already know what the topic is for this session: femininity. Therefore, the stage for the analysis of the first and second viewing of the second scene has already been set. By repeating this pattern in each session, students will become familiar with this process so they can put it into practice in an independent manner when creating their podcast episode.

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[7] It should be noted that some of the students might not be familiar with the plot; hence, they should be allowed to take a few minutes to use their electronic devices to read a summary of the film on the internet.

5. Discussion

The approach presented in this paper is a proposal that is geared towards sharing and generating knowledge within the classroom. Students can learn new ways of thinking critically when working with popular culture—which in this case takes the shape of American cinema—by paying attention to elements that are essential in Cultural Studies, such as power dynamics and "structures of influence and control" (Murray, 2020, p. 442).

Students need to become aware that such elements have always been present in cultural products as much as they have been in their own experience as members of society. Being aware of this fact will encourage them to approach culture and its many manifestations with curiosity as well as with caution.

It could be argued that this approach might not be suitable to get students to become better acquainted with the theoretical foundations of Cultural Studies and the history of American cinema, however, this is not the goal. In fact, the desired result is to make Cultural Studies the vehicle that will allow them to find new ways to critically think of cultural products to begin with, and of any other creation and/or information that they might come across.

In terms of using Kolb's experiential model, a systematic review of the literature by Thomas Howard Morris highlights the importance of providing a clear definition for the aforementioned concept of "concrete experience" ("What is Experiential Learning?", 2024). His analysis narrowed it down to learners being both exposed to novel experiences as well as active participants, situating knowledge in a specific place and time, and ensuring meaningful learning is achieved by means of looking into and critically reflecting on real-world problems (Morris, 2019, pp. 1064-1077).

These factors have been taken into account when designing the approach that is being presented in this article. The steps that were described in the previous practical demonstration fit into Morris' findings. Nonetheless, making the students interested enough to be willing to become involved during the class might be the lecturer's primary concern. Bearing this in mind, the thorough preparation of the Q&A session needs to be a priority for the lecturer in order to engage students for the remainder of the session.

With regard to creating the actual podcast episode, the main challenge may be found in working in teams. Even though collaborative learning has many benefits both in education and professional environments (Luo et al., 2021; Planas-Lladó et al., 2020), research has found that students' main concerns when it comes to group work are social loafing and free-riding, meaning that one or more team members will benefit from the work done by the others (Forsell et al., 2020, p. 95; Riebe et al., 2016, p. 632).

A potential solution to prevent this problem is to create an assessment procedure that allows teams to assign a percentage of the mark to each member, as well as inform students that teams where all members contribute with their fair share obtain higher grades (Planas-Lladó et al., 2020, p. 191; Riebe et al., 2016, p. 633).

The involvement and commitment of the lecturer are crucial to guiding students and helping them overcome the challenges that this project poses. With this in mind, it is fair to say that both creating an assessment system that guarantees all team members feel compelled to share the workload in a balanced way and fostering communication within the classroom are essential elements to ensuring students complete this project successfully.

6. Conclusion

This approach to Cultural Studies and American cinema has the potential to awaken students' interest in both by giving them the opportunity to make use of their digital skills and knowledge. Simultaneously, these skills will also improve and develop in ways that students might not have been aware of before. In addition, working with popular culture functions as a way of making this project more appealing to students.

In this case, American films are the cultural products they will work with since watching a film can be, and it almost always is, an enjoyable experience. Furthermore, it is one that students can have together, which justifies why from the very beginning teams are advised and encouraged to watch the film as a group. In fact, the debate that can ensue after watching the film is a starting point for the members of the group in developing their podcast episode.

Notwithstanding, it is not guaranteed that each and every student will become interested in or fascinated with filmmaking, and American cinema more specifically. However, this is why experiential learning must take place in order to help students realize that their own experiences and beliefs are essential to develop the process to work with the materials at hand. The experiential learning method aims to foster communication between lecturer and students, as well as among students themselves. It also seeks to help students gain confidence and independence in combining their digital skills with their critical thinking, making them in turn more vocal and willing to both answer and ask questions.

In any case, it is also necessary to take into consideration that communication skills and digital knowledge will not be the same for each and every student. When working in higher education the number of students per class tends to be quite large, meaning that for the lecturer it is challenging to determine whose skills are developed enough and whose are not. Additionally, too many students in the classroom can hinder their willingness to participate in class discussions and debates.

This is an issue that might become an obstacle to successfully developing the experiential learning method in the classroom. Possible measures to deal with this problem will have to be set on a case-by-case basis, as students' attitudes towards public speaking and debating can vary depending on their schooling experience, their social class, and/or their country of origin, just to name some of the factors that can potentially be at play.

To conclude, this project has been designed to support students in their academic learning by showing them that the academic environment they are in is not only a place where they receive new information but also one where they are encouraged to produce their own. While it is true that this approach does not come without its challenges, it would be fair to say that it can also encourage students to pursue other forms of learning and analyzing materials.

Students should be aware that their ability to create a podcast episode or even a whole podcast production—even if it is as amateurs—is not limited to the classroom, but rather can be redirected to topics they are genuinely interested in. Thus, they will become active participants in higher education by creating and generating knowledge that is not necessarily constricted by traditional and strict academic norms.

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