Menssink on Trial: An Eighteenth-century Court Case and a Multimedia Tutorial

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Introduction

In 1997, the Andrew B. Mellon Foundation funded a pilot project in humanities courseware development at the University of Cape Town (UCT) under the direction of Professor Martin Hall. The pilot project, which has now received further support, was called the Multimedia Education Group (MEG). One of our first projects (the Isiseko Referencing Project) was a set of two tutorial-length multimedia packages that introduced first-year students of varying preparedness to the concept of evidence and referencing within the disciplines of English and History. As courseware developer for History and related disciplines, I was tasked to find a case study for the first History tutorial that would introduce students to the notion of historical sources and analytical perspective as a precursor to discussions about the importance of referencing those sources. Because evaluation was an integral part of the project design, we commissioned an evaluatory study by INFOLIT, an education NGO, which ran alongside the first implementation of the courseware.

The story of Brewer Menssink, researched by Dr. Nigel Penn of the UCT History Department[1], was selected for the multimedia tutorial. A rollicking eighteenth-century tale of 'sex, beer and politics', it revolves around the adulterous and murderous activities of the Cape Town beer brewer, Willem Menssink. In the tutorial, the key issues are highlighted by a court case of 1713 in which several slaves, belonging to Menssink and his estranged

[1] Subsequently published as N. Penn, 'The Fatal Passion of Brewer Menssink' in *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways* (1999).

wife, are given harsh sentences for crimes including adultery, infanticide and attempted murder. Their testimony, and that of Menssink's wife, implicates Menssink in these acts, but he is never brought to trial for his key role in the crimes. He is subsequently divorced by his wife and abandoned by most of his friends, but Dutch settler society does not publicly distance itself from his dastardly acts.

As courseware developer, and as a historian specializing in medical history, I was intrigued by the case. It was complex and interesting, providing ample opportunity for the use of humour. It also lent itself well to graphical representation as the records were unusually good and contained a number of references to the physical context of the events (e.g. houses, clothing). The historical evidence posed intriguing questions about what had happened and who had been guilty, questions which had to remain somewhat open in the end. In addition, the analysis of the court case presented an interesting contrast between the way in which the disciplines of law and social history ask different questions of historical evidence. Students steeped in the 'whodunnit' genres of thrillers, television and film were, like non-historians, more likely to focus on finding out what happened in the past and who had done wrong, than on a more complex and abstract analysis of social relations in the past, including for example an examination of gender or class relations. The Menssink tale provided us with an opportunity to explore both kinds of analysis, helping students to understand what historians do and how they use different sources of evidence.

The First-year Course

Not many universities can boast the luxury of their own multimedia developers, especially in the humanities subjects. Most have to depend on the introduction of commercial courseware that needs careful pruning and support to serve the needs of the course or the students. Of course, even with custom-made courseware, the context of its use is critical to its success. One of the fundamental principles of our work at MEG was the close link that should be made between the multimedia tutorials and the rest of the course.

The HIS 100W course was described as:

> An introduction to the study of the past [which] lays a foundation for further studies in history and cognate disciplines. It will introduce students to visual, oral and written sources and the ways in which

> historians of Africa have used them. Use will be made of specially designed multimedia materials.
>
> The course will examine topics in African history ... such as African societies before the sixteenth century; the age of the slave trade; the impact of imperialism; and Africa in the era of decolonisation and nationalism. It will also draw appropriate parallels with developments in other areas of the world, and in this way introduce a comparative approach to the past[2].

Nigel Worden (course convenor) explained that the course was focused on

> skills development as students and historians; deliberate reflection of case studies demonstrating historical processes which develop academic skills and historical skills—critical reading; how historians make arguments; thinking about evidence—use and abuse; how knowledge is produced and analysed[3].

Student assessment was conducted throughout the course. Tutorial submissions and a mid-semester test counted 20% of the final mark, and an essay (handed in towards the end of the course counted a further 20%, while the final examination counted 60%. The test was focused on students' ability to use textual primary sources in relation to a particular topic, while the essay and the exam focused on students' ability to make use of evidence in formulating a structured argument on a particular topic. The course was thus consciously directed at a stepwise process of skills development, moving beyond the content delivery approach.

Integrating Course and Courseware

The multimedia materials were designed to complement the course content and its focus on skills development. The two Referencing Project tutorials were therefore designed around the theme of Cape slavery. The first one (Making History: the Menssink Court Case) provided students with an opportunity to explore the use of primary sources about an eighteenth century

[2] Course outline.

[3] History course convenor and tutor: interview with INFOLIT evaluators, 1 April 1998 quoted in INFOLIT report, p.25.

court case and the broader issue of historians' use of multiple sources. The second (Argument, Evidence and Referencing) focused on referencing skills by exploring the construction of an academic argument, with supporting evidence and references. The examples were linked to readings that were to be used for the course essay.

We worked with the enthusiastic course convener in the History Department, Prof. Nigel Worden, to integrate the multimedia courseware into the program design, and to provide a preparatory lecture on Menssink before the multimedia session and a follow-up face-to-face tutorial afterwards. Dr. Nigel Penn gave the lecture. He researched and wrote the Menssink story and also appears in the tutorial on video. This lecture formed part of a broader discussion of the history of the Cape in the eighteenth century, conducted by Prof. Worden. The course, like the tutorial, focused on the use of primary sources. The topic of Cape slavery was also used for the course essay, and Worden reported that many students used examples from the Menssink case as illustrations in their essays.

Within the multimedia tutorial, students were asked to type in answers to questions on computer. They were also given a worksheet of questions to complete and hand in to their tutors. The computer-based answers were supposed to be provided to tutors immediately after the multimedia class, but in the confusion of delivery, this was delayed. Student answers were also difficult to process given the rather simplistic data capture methods (text files) that we had chosen.

Supporting Students

Another key philosophy of MEG, following best practice elsewhere, was to tailor courseware design to its audience, entry-level students. One of the key reasons behind the establishment of MEG was to provide academic support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The idea was that by using computer technologies, resources could be created which included extra explanations and translations for students who needed more assistance than would be provided in class, and additional information and challenges for those who were coping well with the basic material. Because students could control navigation and pace in multimedia tutorials, the same tutorial could be useful to a wide range of students.

In order to understand who our audience was, we did some analysis of their gender and social background, and we also conducted individual

interviews with about ten students who worked through the tutorial prototypes with us and made comments and suggestions for improvement. The social profile of the History students was as follows:[4]

'Race'	Number
'African'	41
'White'	45
'Coloured'	10
'Indian'	4
Total	100

Gender	'African'	Non-'African'	Total
Female	15 (37%)	40 (68%)	55
Male	26 (63%)	19 (32%)	45
Total	41 (100%)	59 (100%)	100

The racial classifications (based on Apartheid classifications because the legacy of racist educational provision before 1994 has not yet been reversed) suggest that there was a clear need for some student support to assist disadvantaged students. Nearly half of the students (45%) had been classified 'White' for their school careers and would have received preferential treatment in terms of educational funding before 1994. But the balance of the students (classified as 'African' (41%), 'Coloured' (10%) and 'Indian' (10%)) would not have been so fortunate: many of them would have had poor quality secondary and primary education because of government policies. Also, in the class as a whole, only approximately 55% of the students would have had English as their 'main language at home'[5] although English is the language of instruction at university.

Women predominated in the course as a whole (although not by much). Taking racial groups separately, however, women predominated even

[4] INFOLIT report, p. 27.

[5] Results estimated by taking English and History first-year students together, as in the INFOLIT report, p. 32ff.

more markedly in all groups except 'Africans' where they constituted only 37% of the group. This pattern is probably produced by the tendency for male students to seek science, commerce or medical education where they can meet the entry requirements (many disadvantaged students cannot) and to the tendency for men to be given preference over women in families which are not sufficiently wealthy to be able to send all their children to school or university. (Racial classifications corresponded to some degree with class distinctions under the previous dispensation, a situation which has not been reversed after the democratic transition of 1994.) But although all the students came from educational backgrounds where their gender mattered, there were no indices on the INFOLIT scales where men and women differed significantly, except perhaps reported confidence in class and individual learning[6].

Staff Reactions

In most humanities departments, computer-aided learning is driven by pioneering staff members from within the department itself. Because MEG was a separate department within UCT we had to expend considerable energy in attracting interest from departments in using our courseware, encouraging as much involvement as possible in its development and then making sure that the courseware was used optimally. We were fortunate in that Prof. Worden shared our enthusiasm for multimedia use, agreed that it should be carefully designed and tightly integrated with other elements of the course, and did not see computer courseware as a band-aid for deficiencies elsewhere in the course. After using the tutorials, he commented as follows:

> Benefits [of using the multimedia tutorials] were palpable. Certainly the tut on Menssink was a great success, because students had worked through the materials in the laboratory [before coming to the classroom tutorial] and were enthused by it (mind you, it IS lovely material!) .... The strong emphasis in the course on the use of primary sources was also reinforced greatly by the MM materials, and this showed in the assignment work[7].

[6] INFOLIT report, p. 32.

[7] E-mail communication to Harriet Deacon, 10 March 1999.

The UCT History Department plans to use the Menssink tutorial again in the future. We were, however, careful to acknowledge that success in using the tutorial depended to a great extent on the approach taken by course convener and on tutors. During the first roll-out, not all departmental staff involved in the course came to demonstrations of the software before the course began or accessed them in the student laboratory. Realizing that staff did not always want to use the student laboratory, we put a version of both tutorials on the university network for staff as well, but even so, not all tried it. In humanities departments, which have felt budget cuts most severely in South Africa, many staff have neither the equipment or the skills to use computer-based materials.

Although Worden was very aware of the role of technology as a way of presenting historical materials rather than an end in itself, some staff members were overly distracted by the medium. One tutor commented,

> I understand that [the purpose of introducing the materials] is to get students to sit in front of technology and get used to technology—open to correction. More people are already exposed. Problem may be pitch—brighter students may be getting bored[8].

While this tutor was certainly correct about the problem of pitch, this related far more to the content and skills development side of the tutorial than to the technology aspect (see below). Although computer skills were a part of what students gained from doing the tutorials, MEG's philosophy was to tie this interaction very closely to relevant content, and to emphasize content over medium by making the tutorial user-friendly.

Student Use of the Tutorial

The student computer laboratories were booked for numerous sessions to give students adequate time with the multimedia materials. MEG staff were on hand to protect student access during these times and to provide technical support. Student pressure on the computer laboratories made it important to expend considerable time in policing access during booked times. Departmental staff came to some of the laboratory sessions to answer historical questions, and the History courseware developer (and author of the

[8] History course convenor and tutor: Interview with INFOLIT evaluators, 1 April 1998 quoted in INFOLIT report, p. 27.

multimedia materials) was present at most of the sessions, so subject-related questions were easily addressed.

We found it difficult to predict the level of student computer literacy—specifically, their technical competence in using laboratory login procedures, the mouse and Windows. The Baseline survey, conducted the previous year on some of the UCT History students (as well as UCT English students and some English and History students from UWC) suggested that by the end of their first year, up to 86% of students had had some computer experience, either with computer games or word processing[9]. This was not particularly useful in determining how many History 1 students in 1998 had computer experience at the beginning of their first year, but since students did not have computer materials built into their History or English courses in 1997, it may be regarded as a (slightly exaggerated) ballpark figure for 1998. This was borne out by observation (see below).

A question on computer experience was also included in the INFOLIT student questionnaire which measured student confidence with a variety of types of software and student access to computers. Their 'index of computer competence' shows that of the 64 History 1 students who answered the questionnaire, 11% (n=3) were 'able to use computers', 23% (n=15) had 'some computer experience' and 66% (n=42) were 'not very computer competent'[10]. Unfortunately it is not clear how they have defined computer competence, because some of the software which the INFOLIT student questionnaire asks about is clearly more advanced or specialized than history students would require to be able to use the multimedia materials (e.g. database, spreadsheet, statistical, graphic design and computer aided design packages). Few first year students would have competence in these areas, nor would they need them in their courses but they could still be 'able to use computers'. The INFOLIT conclusion about the computer-related abilities of the students provides a dramatic contrast both to the Baseline survey and to what we observed in the laboratories regarding basic computer competence (i.e. Windows literacy). This problem highlights the complexity of the concept of computer literacy, and the need to tailor questions and analysis to the specific computer literacy requirements of a project.

The use of the multimedia materials required knowledge of special laboratory login procedures, the ability to use a mouse and some Windows

[9] Summary of Baseline survey (http://www.meg.uct.ac.za/baseline.htm).
[10] INFOLIT report, p. 34.

literacy. After logging into the network, students accessed the multimedia materials through a management system called Manager's Edge, which had a separate login procedure. Students were introduced to the login system before the Menssink tutorial in a preparatory session using the multimedia program 'Africa 1300' which had been developed by Fiona Wilson of MEG. The session was tied in with History lectures on Great Zimbabwe, which was featured in Africa 1300. It enabled the department and MEG to assess the level of student computer literacy, which was good on the whole, and to check that all students had laboratory passwords and knew how to login. While the majority of students (around 70%, by observation) could manage with Windows and the mouse, many of them had difficulties with the complicated laboratory login procedure and some also had difficulties with the multimedia management program logins. Although men and women students scored similarly on the INFOLIT indices of computer confidence[11], observation by MEG staff in the laboratory suggests that women who had been given computer instruction before often felt less confident than men in the same position or women who had never used a computer.

The poor organization of password allocation and distribution (due to laboratory understaffing and a weak password-creation software package), and the unfriendly login procedure in the laboratories, made it difficult for first-time computer users to start confidently on the computer. But once they started the multimedia tutorial they had few technical difficulties. Over three quarters, or 77% (n=38) of MEG questionnaire respondents found the tutorial easy to do. As Nigel Worden commented,

> Some students not used to computers were a bit intimidated at first, but I think this was overcome by the end of the course' [12].

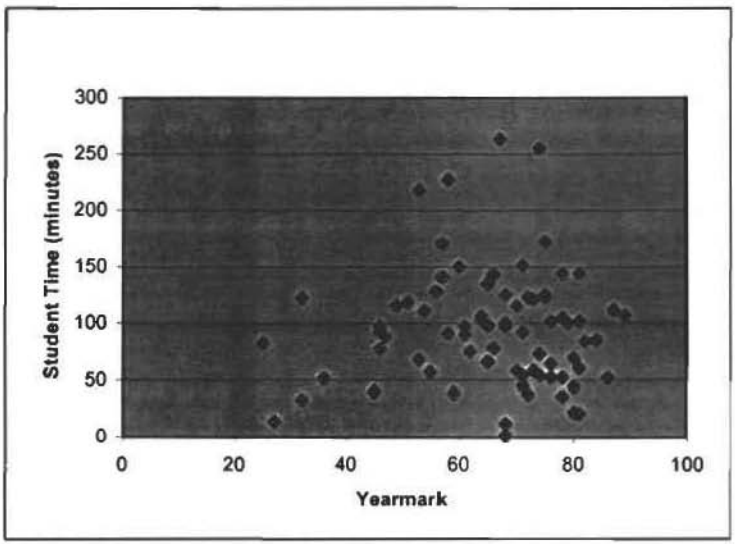
One of the major advantages of the computer-based medium is that it allowed students to learn at their own pace. If one plots time spent with the tutorial against the student's yearmark, a general measure of competence in the coursework, one can assess the variation in time spent on the tutorial and also whether weaker students generally spent more time with it.

The graph below (Figure 1: Student Time Spent on Messink by Yearmark) shows that most of the 76 students spent between 50 and 150

[11] INFOLIT report, pp. 34,37.
[12] E-mail communication to Harriet Deacon, 10 March 1999.

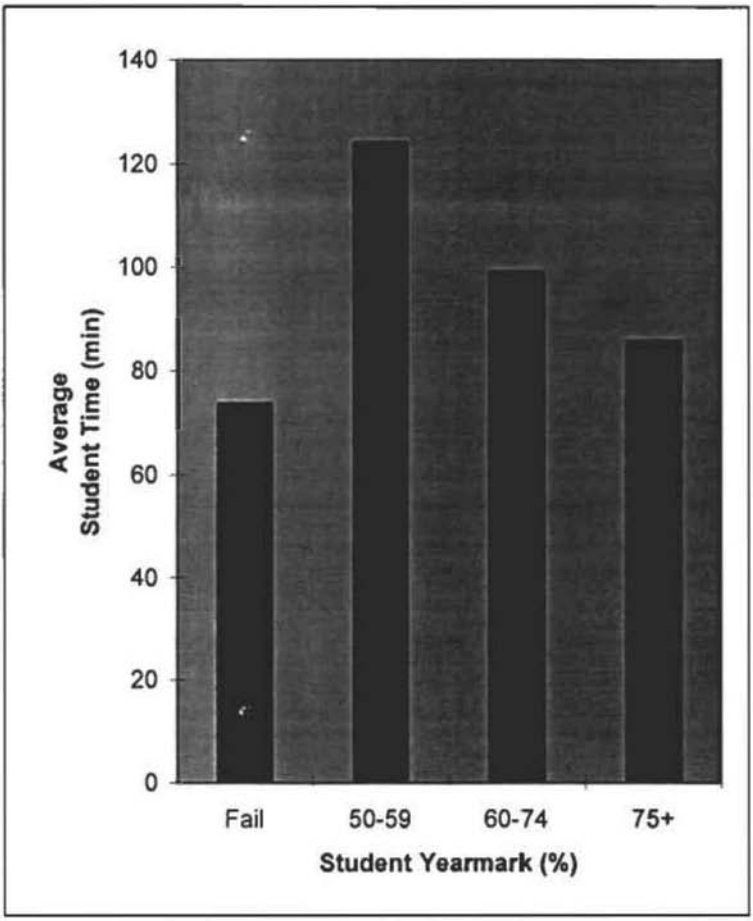
minutes on the tutorial but that there was variation in a range between 2 minutes and 255 minutes. The variation between students (in terms of time taken on the tutorial) was of course greatest in the middle of the class, where the bulk of the students were concentrated. Further statistical analysis could reveal that mid-range students tended to spend more time on the tutorial.

Figure 1: Student Time Spent on Messink by Yearmark



If one groups the students by their yearmark, it seems that the students who failed spent on average, less time using the multimedia tutorial than those who passed. Among those who passed, the longest average time was recorded for the weaker students and the shortest time for the strongest students. This suggests that students who failed the course did not take the tutorial (or the course) seriously enough to spend time on it, or were alienated by it. Those students who passed required differing amounts of time with the tutorial depending on their competence in the course: weaker students required more time. While the statistical significance of these findings should be further examined, the graph below and the one above do at least suggest that the tutorial was useful in allowing students to complete the work at their own pace, and that this pace differed significantly among students.

Figure 2: Average Time Spent on Tutorial by Yearmark



Student Response

MEG questionnaires showed that the overwhelming number of students (91%, n=45) found the tutorial relevant to their course. All but one respondent (who left it blank) said they learned something from the tutorial. In the open-ended question about what they learned, most of these (n=37, 75%) referred to the historical content of the tutorial rather than historical analytical skills or

computer skills. However, this trend does not mean that they did not learn historical skills, reflecting perhaps more the perception of history as facts that they learned from the school environment. In general the feeling was positive: 94% said they would like to do this kind of tutorial in the future. Only three out of 49 respondents (6%) said they would not like to use tutorials on computer again. One commented, 'It's funny, interesting, a better way to learn—I loved the pictures'. Another felt that it 'clarified a lot [in the rest of the course], especially [the] background info + extra reading'. From the INFOLIT post-intervention questionnaire we can see that different sections of the tutorial appealed to different students but most said that all sections were useful.

The program was specifically designed to assist students who might be struggling with aspects of the course. Some students still found the program challenging: one felt there should be more 'simple, understandable terms', a few complained it was long and tiring. Yet the weaker students who struggled with the materials were in a minority and departmental staff reported that weaker students were in general much more confident in the subsequent classroom tutorials having worked through the multimedia materials at their own pace:

> We felt that the weakest students, especially, benefited [from using the multimedia tutorials], and were much more confident to speak about the case and the issues it raised [in the subsequent classroom sessions]'[13].

Roughly speaking, according to responses in the INFOLIT post-intervention questionnaire the weaker students generally found the section on 'Being an Historian' more useful than stronger students did—about five of the seventeen students did not find this section useful.

There was some concern that the tutorial was pitched at too low a level for university students. One staff member suggested before the tutorial was used that a 'Problem may be pitch—brighter students may be getting bored'[14]. Nigel Worden commented after students completed the course that:

[13] E-mail communication to Harriet Deacon, 10 March 1999.

[14] History course convenor and tutor: Interview with INFOLIT evaluators, 1 April 1998 quoted in INFOLIT report, p. 27.

> Some of the best students said that they wanted to go further than the [multimedia] materials allowed for—but they could do this in the [classroom] tuts[15].

Just under half of the students said in the INFOLIT post-intervention questionnaire that they wanted 'more detailed information' on the court case; the other half said the information was 'interesting and had the correct amount of detail'. Two of the students in the MEG questionnaire (6% of respondents to question 8) found the tutorial too easy. One explained, 'I think this would be a nice programme for schools, but below matric [school leavers'] level'. The other student commented,

> I'd expected the program to be slightly more detailed and advanced. This program's approach is appropriate to high school (or even primary school) standard.

In the INFOLIT questionnaire, completed by about 17 students, two students also complained either that some sections were 'simplistic' or information on the court case was 'uninteresting and repetitive'. These students do not seem to be the same ones who returned similar comments in the MEG questionnaire. But interestingly, they all seem to have performed roughly in the lower second-class category in the course as a whole.

The tutorial's presentation style, using simple English and cartoon-like illustrations, may have coloured student assessment of its difficulty. As one of the students who found it too easy said, 'history is not looking at funny pics, it's academic, serious research'. He was worried about the attempt to 'make history fun' in this way: 'The university should not waste its resources [on] motivation [of students]'. It is a sad reflection of the type of history that has been taught in many schools and universities to date that pictures (especially 'funny' ones) are not seen as material for 'serious research', but only as motivational tools for the less enthusiastic student. University history courses generally do not include historical maps of the kind used in the Menssink tutorial, nor do they show students what historical characters would be wearing. In order to understand Cape Town society of the time, students need to look at contemporary maps to see how small the Dutch settlement was. The cartoons used in the tutorial were all historically accurate in terms of

[15] E-mail communication to Harriet Deacon, 10 March 1999.

clothing (complete with early eighteenth-century hairstyles). Not only was clothing an important element in understanding the dynamics of the Menssink story (as Menssink's degeneracy was symbolised by his red nightgown), but it is a piece in the historical puzzle of the social and cultural environment of Cape Town at that time. The Menssink story was chosen partly for its amusing and dramatic appeal, but this aspect of the story and its presentation in a medium of instruction other than the printed page should not be interpreted as making it any less 'serious' a research project for students. There are however a small group of students who might be put off by the tutorial's presentation style and some alterations in the cartoon style will be attempted in future tutorials.

There were relatively few of the stronger students who complained it was too easy, however, and most of the weaker students (and those without prior computer experience) had very few problems understanding the issues and using the tutorial. Since MEG's brief was primarily to address the needs of disadvantaged students we are pleased to have erred on the side of simplicity rather than made it too difficult. The complaints by some of the stronger students are noted, but it is strange that the first-class students did not complain more. It was partly a question of attitude: one student commented,

> [The tutorial aimed] to teach us about a fairly complex case in a very easy way. Cartoon characters are easier to remember than pages and pages[16].

The issues surrounding the Menssink case were indeed complex, and the historical questions in the tutorial gave as much scope for advanced students to explore this complexity as would a classroom-based tutorial. With more explicit mediation before the tutorial is used by students, the stronger students could be directed to examine more difficult issues within it.

Student Performance in the Tutorial

The tutorial had no test, but contained three sets of questions that the students were asked to answer. These questions were designed to start students thinking about the kinds of issues that might interest a historian (*viz.* fact, contemporary meaning and historical analysis):

[16] INFOLIT post-test comment from Amanda Tait.

The 'What happened' questions: these were easy factual answers requiring a reading of the court case, and were correctly answered by most students, including the weaker ones. While these questions could be made more difficult, they were intended to establish a basis from which more complex questions could be approached and to give weaker students confidence in using the tutorial.

The Judges' questions: these were easy, factual answers requiring a reading of the section on the contemporary judgement, and were correctly answered by most students, including the weaker ones. While these questions could be made more difficult, they were intended to establish a basis from which students could challenge the contemporary verdict and to give weaker students confidence in using the tutorial.

The Historians' questions: these were more complex, but the answers to them were essentially given in the tutorial itself if the student had worked through the court case and the section on 'being an historian'. The answers required an understanding of concepts like gender and the issue of bias in primary sources. They required similar skills to those needed in the exam. Most students were able to answer them at least partially, but the best students summarized the issues well.

Case study: A candidate who scored only 32% in the final exam for the semester course spent 122 minutes doing the tutorial. Her answers to the historical questions[i] show that she read much of the tutorial and was confident enough to attempt an answer for most questions. The quality of the answers is however low: the first of her answers is only partial, the second answer broadly accurate although somewhat coy and lacking any reference to the case at hand, the second last answer seems to be based on a misunderstanding of the question, and the last answer does not give any credit to the complexity of the situation (which is discussed in the tutorial).

Case study: One student (who scored 74% in the exam) spent 255 minutes doing the tutorial and provided excellent answers[ii]. A first-class student (who scored 75% in the final exam) spent 125 minutes on the tutorial, and provided a better quality of answer[iii] than the failed student mentioned above although she did not provide all the answers required. Her first answer provides more information than the weaker student's answer on reasons for Menssink avoiding arrest. Her second

answer is fuller too, and attempts (although not entirely successfully) to give some evidence from the Menssink case. The other historical questions were not answered.

Students were also asked to write down their own historical questions about the case. Most of these answers engaged well with the issues raised in the tutorial[iv] [v] [vi] but few students made the effort to do this section. Perhaps there would be a better response rate in a classroom situation.

Measuring Added Value

The most frequent question directed at projects like MEG by funders and management structures is whether the extra money spent on computer-based materials is worth it. It is hard to measure whether computer-based courseware improves student performance, as we can only guess what their performance would have been without the courseware, and measurement of performance is an inexact science in any case. More fundamentally, we need to ask the same question of other teaching modes, like face-to-face tutorials and lectures. And we need to measure relative costs and overheads, which is no trivial task.

Anecdotal evidence from the UCT History course suggests that weaker students were in general much more confident in the subsequent classroom tutorials having worked through the multimedia materials at their own pace. "[T]he strongest students ... also enjoyed and benefited from [the tutorial]."[17]

It is hard to measure the value added to student learning by the tutorial because we cannot measure how the same students might have performed without access to the tutorial. There was no simultaneous control group, nor is such a method of evaluation ethically desirable or easy to set up. We can compare 1998 students with those in the 1997 class, but the quality of intake differs from year to year. Departmental staff suggest that the 1998 class was generally stronger than the 1997 class, so it would be difficult to measure the extent to which student performance was further enhanced (if at all) by the multimedia materials in 1998. The Russell Project survey of students in 1997 may provide some data for comparison because it tracks student improvement over the year, using written submissions and interviews. Comparing 1997 and 1998 rates of improvement on specific competencies, like using primary

[17] Worden, E-mail communication to Harriet Deacon, 10 March 1999.

sources and an understanding of what historians do, could form the basis for a very rough evaluation of the role of multimedia materials. However, since the course itself changed between 1997 and 1998 such measures would be very rough. A better way of measuring the impact of the multimedia intervention may be pre- and post-intervention tests and interviews, which were not adequately designed in the INFOLIT evaluation, but which are being addressed by MEG's new independent evaluation team, from SAIDE.

Robben Island Museum
Robben Island

Endnotes

[i] (a) 'The Judges didn't interrogate or sentence Menssink because: He befriended Adam Tas and Henning Husing and agreed to their politics which was a burgher opposition to corruption in the DEIC government at Cape. (b) 'What the case can tell us about gender relations: The people back then were sexist. The male voice was heard more clearly especially if one belonged to a certain class'. (c) 'How did the use of torture affect slave evidence? Some of them may tend to exaggerate when they see that the judge is on their side, therefore asking for a less painful sentence'. (d) 'Did settler society condone Menssink's actions? They fully accepted his deeds because they never charged him for trying to murder his wife or for adultery'.

[ii] '(a) The Judges didn't interrogate or sentence Menssink because: There are three main reasons why Menssink was not called to testify in this case. Firstly, because of his poltical connections with Tas and Husing, the judges were wary of trying him in the case. Secondly, because of his high social status. The court did not wish to make Menssink appear to be equal to the slaves in the eyes of D.E.I.C. law. By making him testify, this is what would have happened. Finally, since Menssink was involved in beer production, he was protecting the D.E.I.C.'s interests. (b) What the case can tell us about gender relations: This case shows us how unequal the gender relations were in the 18th century Cape society. Both Elizabeth and Tryntjie were disadvantaged in relation to their male counterparts because they were women. Menssink could do as he pleased and Elizabeth could not really do much about the matter. Tryntjie as a female, could not resist Menssink's sexual advances which

perhaps she could have done had she been a man. (c) How did the use of torture affect slave evidence? Bearing in mind the possible fate of torture or death in exchange for their evidence, the slaves tried to present themselves and their statements as favourably as possible. This should be remembered when reading their answers to the questions posed. (d) Did settler society condone Menssink's actions? Although it was generally accepted that Dutch colonists slept with the female slaves, William Menssink was still condoned to some extent for his actions regarding his relationship with Tryntjie and the fact that they had plotted together to kill his wife. Menssink was forced to give up his captaincy and membership of the Burgher Council, pay his instalments by selling his possessions and grant Elizabeth a divorce. Another result was that his creditors suddenly demanded their money'.

[iii] (a) 'The Judges didn't interrogate or sentence Menssink because: Menssink had political connections. He was related to Adam Tas and Henning Husing. Tas and Husing led Burgher opposition to corruption in the DEIC and succeeded in getting Van der Stel recalled to Holland. He had a high social status. The DEIC tried to maintain the social and judicial distance between masters and slaves so Menssink was not brought to trial with his slaves. He was a brewer in CT and had to make sure his beer supplies did not dry up. These reasons helped him to escape prosecution. (b) 'What the case can tell us about gender relations: It can be clearly seen that there was male dominance in the 18th century. Most stories were written by men so there is not much information or a lot to say about women of that time. Women were not treated with respect. The fact that Menssink had a female slave with whom he was having an affair with, shows that there was a disrespect for women'.

[iv] 'My own questions would be: Were the judges or the scribe biased in any way? Just how accurate is our information that we are given? Why was Menssink not called to give evidence at least? My answers would be found in: Court records or personal diary entries. We might find some information, but it may be biased or slanted towards one side. We might not get the full events or testimony. But overall, it seems enough information was given to produce a correct verdict'.

[v] 'My own questions would be: How widespread was adultery? How did they justify their actions? How did the punishment on Robben Island operate?

What became of the children produced in slave-owner relationships? Were female slave owners also involved in adultery with male slaves? My answers would be found in: the records of slave owners (e.g. diaries, letters etc.). Other court cases and V.O.C. records may also provide answers'.

[vi] 'My own questions would be: what was the relationship between the slaves and the master and did they agree with him?; also: the relationship between Menssink and his wife [i.e. gender relationships] and why was social standing so important (!) when all the owners slept with their slaves? My answers would be found in: library information on the life at the Cape at the time and I think, the answers would be on the lines of indicating that men were of a higher standing and that often they got away with "murder"'.

References

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