
Welcome

The Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT) is excited to launch this second issue of *Outside the Box Assessment and Feedback Practices*.

As a University, we are proud of our mission to **transform lives and inspire change**. Our approach to high-quality, experiential and personalised learning and teaching is a hallmark of this commitment.

Assessment is central to the student experience. Assessment measures students' achievements towards learning outcomes, and provides important developmental opportunities to improve performance through feedback and reflection.

[The University's approach to quality enhancement of learning and teaching](#) recognises the importance of sharing good practice. Through mechanisms such as *Outside the Box Assessment and Feedback Practices*, we are able to identify excellent ideas in 'niche' areas and transfer them into 'mainstream' use.

If you have an example of assessment or feedback practice that you feel is unusual, flexible, creative, experiential, authentic, applied, exciting, or just plain wonderful, please do let us know. We look forward to featuring your examples in future issues of this publication.

Also, please visit our [Assessment & Feedback Portal](#) for more information about assessment and feedback at the University of Northampton. We hope these resources continue to support your work in transforming and inspiring others.

The Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

The University of Northampton

www.northampton.ac.uk/ilt

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University of Northampton
2016

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Example 1

Online forum assignment for Early Childhood Studies

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In Year 3 of the Early Childhood Studies programme, students can elect to do a specialist health and social care module. As part of this module students are required to critically analyse the implications of contemporary health and social care policy. This is partly achieved through an online forum assignment. This assignment supports students in online debating with their peers on a contemporary and controversial issue within health and social care. An example of a debate topic could be '*Children brought up by two parents of the same sex are disadvantaged*'.

Students are set up on a discussion forum on NILE, supported by a Learning Technologist. Students are assigned debate roles (for and against) and contribute five times to the debate, totalling 2500 words. Students have the opportunity to write creatively, use video captions, embed articles, images etc. Students plan how and when they are going to respond to each other's contributions. Students have the opportunity to enhance their debating skills supported by a concisely written analysis of the debate issue. References support all contributions.

The whole debate is read and marked and students are given specific feedback for their individual contributions. Marks are allocated for critical debate and analysis of the subject area, but also for evidence of debate 'etiquette' in responding appropriately and professionally to other students.

Often students are apprehensive about the initial stages being set up on NILE. The module evaluations suggest students enjoy the peer debate and the creative nature of the assignment. They also enjoy having an alternative to writing essays.

Example 2

Online discussion for assessment in Education, Children and Young People

Jean Edwards, Senior Lecturer in Education

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With Wendy Yarnall, Julie Jones, Dom Murphy, Abbie Deeming, Estelle Tarry, Ken Bland and Emel Thomas, School of Education

During Year 1 and Year 2 of the Foundation Degree in Learning and Teaching (FDLT) and the final year BA Learning and Teaching (BALT), students take part in online NILE discussion boards as part of their learning and assessment. Table 1 summarises the key information and emphasises the cumulative nature of the experience that students have. This ultimately leads to them being able to act as what Lim et al (2010) refer to as student facilitators in the BALT PDT 3003 module.

	FDLT Year 1 PDT 1063	FDLT year 2 PDT2004	FDLT Year 2 PDT 2016	BALT PDT 3003
Discussion context	Communication, speaking and listening in schools	What is Professionalism?	Learning beyond the classroom – implications for learning	A range of statements based around the curriculum, diversity, whole school issues, issues with an international context
Groups	Familiar teaching group (about 15 in each group)	Whole cohort	Mixed across three venues (about 10)	Mixed across three venues (8)
Roles	Participant	Participant	Participant	Leader in one debate, audience member in three debates
Open for	Two weeks	Three weeks	Two weeks	One week, four times
Assessment	Download posts to a total of 1500 words	Not formally assessed	Download posts to a total of 3000 words	AS1 - Download posts to a total of 1500 words AS2 – write a 1000 word position statement as leader of a debate AS3 – reflect on the overall impact of the roles and experience

Table 1: A summary of students' cumulative experience

Assignments are focused initially on marking the posts downloaded by students. The learning outcomes and criteria grid refer to aspects specific to the nature of a discussion board such as timing of posts, use of subject headings to support the audience, quality of interaction with the other participants and how the title or purpose of the discussion is addressed. By the BALT year other aspects such as the leadership role in the debate, the use of persuasive language, and reflection upon the impact of the experience are a feature of the assessment. We have developed criteria grids which are specifically built around this type of assessment. As marking tutors we have found that they have greatly supported our marking.

In the final assignment in PDT3003 students' reflect upon the impact of their experiences. These reflective accounts reveal that being challenged to find, evaluate and use a range of literature to argue for and against supports their finding and use of reading in other course modules. They often identify that constructing arguments and supporting these in a debate has an overall impact on their critical thinking. Some students also note that they now have more confidence in their work situation when called upon to express their views and take part in discussion. Perhaps most significantly, students report that when asked to discuss current issues in education during interviews for postgraduate teacher training courses they are able to draw upon their debating experience.

Reference:

Lim, S.C.R., Cheung, W.S. and Hew, K.F. (2011). Critical thinking in asynchronous online discussion: an investigation of student facilitation techniques. *New Horizons in Education* 59 (1):52-65.

Example 3

Using Kaltura audio recordings to provide assignment support

Julian Brown, Senior Lecturer in SEN and Inclusion

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'I haven't written an essay for twenty years!'

Being confronted by this comment from a student, a statement which 'rings true' for many participants on the postgraduate programme I lead, prompted me to reflect on the type of assessment support we offered to students who had anxieties about writing their first essay in years.

The Postgraduate Certificate in Special Educational Coordination is a professional qualification which supports teachers who lead inclusion in their school, which involves working with some of the most vulnerable learners in our schools. Many of these professionals, despite having years of teaching experience, have reservations about academic writing. For the vast majority it is their first experience of writing at Master's level.

Face-to-face tutorials have been part of our assignment support, but I was conscious not everyone was able to attend these tutorial sessions and I was also concerned that 'capturing the moment' for assignment support seemed an inefficient and unsustainable model for cultural change. The first step in my process was to trial a blog for supporting the students' writing. Thereby I hoped to gain their engagement whilst also practicing the very skill I hoped they'd improve. This was met with some of the same anxieties as was exemplified in the statement above. Many of the students were not 'tech savvy' and were reluctant to 'put themselves out there' by writing on a blog. So, I began to consider: What might be an alternative?

I reflected on what use a recording might be...it could be used multiple times...it didn't rely on any particular writing or IT skill...it could be combined with other material, visual and written to provide a multisensory experience...

Since having these thoughts I have developed a number of recordings using Kaltura, in conjunction with Learntech, to support the writing of each assignment on this programme. The various recordings have been used to scaffold their approach to the assignment, whilst at the same time clarifying a number of key points which students need to consider within their writing. The results so far have been positive and have helped to address some of the concerns that students raise, and have given them reassurance that the writing is actually possible and not beyond their reach.

Example 4

Using Kaltura to enhance the quality of assignment guidance

Gill Chambers, Senior Lecturer in Education

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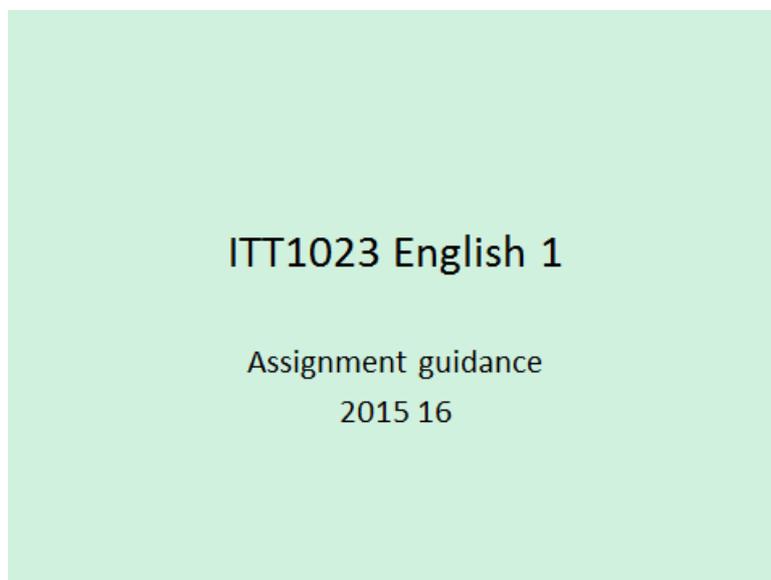
The ITT1023 module introduces the first year BA QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) students to the theory, pedagogy and practice of teaching English in the primary school.

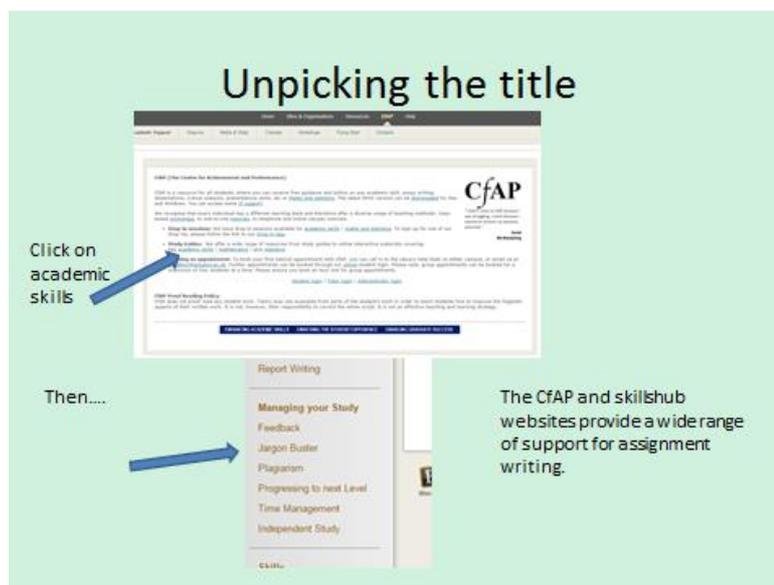
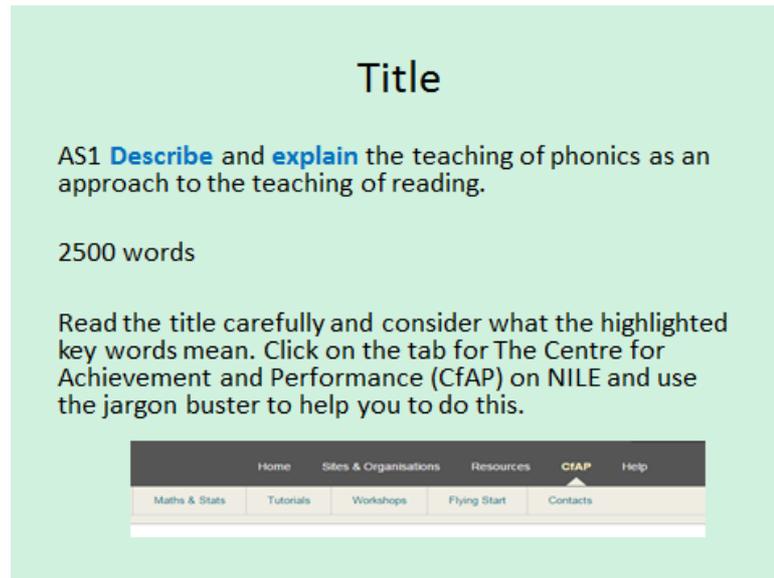
We identified a number of challenges in providing our students with quality assessment support and feedback, which resulted in the following objectives for improvement:

- To improve student satisfaction rates for assessment and feedback (BA QTS Programme Rolling Action Plan target *C9.1 Review of Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies*).
- To achieve equity and clarity in the sharing of assignment guidance and expectations with a cohort of 107 students.
- To strengthen students' perceptions of the quality of assessment and feedback.

The first decision was to decide which tool would be the most effective in achieving the intended outcomes. Belinda Green, our Learntech partner provided invaluable advice and training (and much patience) in how to use Kaltura. Kaltura allows publishers and content owners to publish, manage and analyse their video and other rich-media content.

Students already had access to written assignment guidance available on NILE and, from previous experience, we knew that this would generate further questions about the requirements of the assignment. As a first step, this guidance was merged into a PowerPoint presentation with additional suggestions for how to be successful (Figure 1-3).





Figures 1-3: Assignment Guidance on PowerPoint slides

The voiceover recording was added next. This emphasised the key points and provided a commentary around the slides to provide further advice. To begin with, I found the voiceover recording daunting. The key challenges were avoiding reading out the slides verbatim, speaking sufficiently clearly and at a steady pace, as well as not saying 'um!' The presentation is just over 7 minutes in length and subsequent student feedback will show whether I have judged the suitability of this length accurately.

The Kaltura recording is successfully embedded within NILE and feedback is awaited. https://northampton.mediaspace.kaltura.com/media/ITT1023+version+1/0_cj6ugt6

I have set up a Google doc to gather frequently asked questions; none have arisen yet, but it is early days.

It is anticipated that the advantages of using Kaltura will be:

-
- improved clarity and consistency of guidance
 - strengthening students' confidence in understanding expectations
 - accessibility - the recording can be viewed repeatedly and at students' convenience

The whole process was so simple to execute it has given me the confidence to complete another three Kaltura presentations in a similar format.

Example 5

Assignment Guidance Booklet

Elaine Batchelor, Principal Lecturer in Initial Teacher Education

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Over the past three years, the NSS responses for BA Primary Education have been low. Last year we introduced a common template for all assignments in all years in a booklet which was provided to students at the start of the year. The NSS responses increased from 55% to 71%. In order to support further clarity in giving assignment guidance, a new Assignment Booklet has been designed to provide students with information about the NSS questions, academic integrity, assignment titles and instructions, what is feedback, and key dates. We will be monitoring the impact of this booklet which will be provided in conjunction with online supportive explanations where appropriate. A copy can be sent by sending an email to elaine.batchelor@northampton.ac.uk.

Example 6

Using group blogs to demonstrate learning outside the classroom

Helen Caldwell, Senior Lecturer in Education (Computing)

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With Paul Bracey, Emma Whewell and Rebecca Heaton, School of Education

Group blogs were used as an assessment tool to demonstrate how Primary PGCE students applied a Learning Outside the Classroom (LOC) approach to studying foundation subjects in the UK National Curriculum. Over the course of an academic year, groups of approximately four students created blogs to document reflection on their own learning experiences of LOC practices. The LOC practices shared in the blogs included generation of short and long term plans, and examples of their application of ideas to practice. Over time, the students' reflection occurred both *in action*, *on action* and *for action* (Schön, 1983) as they refined their ideas through site visits, on campus and during school placements. They documented this ongoing development over time through regular journal entries on their blogs, often using collaborative online tools such as Google Docs, Prezi, Padlet, Skype and Facebook. At the end of the year, they used the page options on the blogs to present summaries of their learning in the form of a theoretical rationale, a justification for LOC, a set of curriculum plans and a group presentation.

Additionally, peer-to-peer learning has clearly occurred and evidence has been provided that student learning has been developmental throughout the year spanning both pedagogy and practice. The use of the blog as an assessment tool has been effective in demonstrating group contributions and critique of practice; the students have also been able to produce a variety of media within the assessment, multiplying their learning opportunities and digital literacy. Furthermore, learning has spread across multiple institutions because the students have been able to draw on pedagogy in different school settings and have shared this collaboratively to alter practice in different learning domains. Taken together, this approach represents a move away from teacher directed pedagogy towards a flexible learner-centred approach.

The sample group blog (<http://mypad.northampton.ac.uk/parkrangers/>) below (Figure 4) demonstrates an example of student practice. The blog has acted as a tool for the students to communicate their knowledge and understanding of creative approaches to learning within an authentic real world context. They have been able to work collaboratively despite being geographically dispersed and the medium gave them control over the time, pace and place of learning. The students have been able to add and reflect on each other's contributions whilst creating innovative learning opportunities that they can now take forward into their professional practice.



Figure 4: The sample group blog

The finished digital artefact provided evidence that the collective competence of the group grew over time as they built a shared repertoire of strategies for teaching foundation subjects through LOC.

Reference:

Schön, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.

Example 7

Using group blogs to document art practice

Rebecca Heaton, Senior Lecturer in Art Education

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In the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) division our BA primary second year art specialist students create group blogs throughout their module. The purpose of these blogs is to document art practice, curriculum advancement and reflexive thought. A multi-media patchwork text (Ovens, 2003; Winter, 2003) approach is used to encourage critical analysis of the content and multimedia components posted. To conclude the module, the students present their blogs live as part of a combined assessment strategy where both the presentation and the blog are assessed to achieve their final grade.

The combined assessment has enabled the students to use their blog as a virtual sketchbook, where they can share and reflect on physical and digital content. It has enabled collaborative understanding and student autonomy, whilst also providing the students with an opportunity to practice teaching techniques through live presentation. The group assessment fostered both individual and collective thinking; students devised categories on their blogs to track personal development and had learning scaffolded and extended through collaboration. Although the students were reluctant to use the blogs as an art education tool initially, because they feared the loss of active experiences and traditional processes in the arts, by the end of the module the students found the blogs to be useful tools to document their practice. They also saw the blogs as a means to share experiences with future employees; blogs were valued as 21st century learning and assessment tools (Top et al, 2010; Budge, 2012; Deng et al, 2013). Some students have progressed to adopt blogs as their preferential method to document their final years' art practice.



Figures 5-7: Example Screen Shots from the 2nd Year 2014/15 Art Specialism Blogs

The external examiner in the ITE division's annual report commended the use of blogs as an innovative assessment tool:

"The use of blogs provides very strong evidence of how students make links between subject knowledge development, challenges in primary art education, curriculum and pedagogical design. This is also a platform for reflexive and critical practice from the students." (Payne, 2014-15)

As a teaching, learning and assessment tool our subject discipline is now exploring how student blogs and presentations can contribute towards the development of CPD

provision for students and schools. More specifically, we are investigating how multimedia tools can be used as a curriculum enhancement tool to progress practice in primary art education.

References:

Budge, K. (2012). Art and Design Blogs: a Socially Wise Approach to Creativity. *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 31(1): 44-52.

Deng, L. Yuen, A. (2013). Blogs in pre-service teacher education: exploring the participation issue. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 22(3): 339-356.

Ovens, P. (2003). A Patchwork Text Approach to Teaching in Higher Education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8(4): 545-562.

Payne, R. (2014-15). *External Examiner Annual Report ITE: The University of Northampton*.

Top, E. Yukselturk, E. Inan, F. (2010). Reconsidering usage of blogging in pre-service teacher education courses. *Internet and Higher Education*, 13:214-217.

Winter, R. (2003). Contextualizing the Patchwork Text: Addressing Problems of Coursework Assessment in Higher Education. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 40(2): 112-122.

Example 8

Using blogs with Fashion students

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Fashion, Fashion Textiles, Footwear & Accessories and Surface Design is a Level 6 module which enables design students to articulate the broader context of their design work in a versatile and dynamic manner. Teaching across four different design degrees could be problematic due to the differing design specificities deployed by the students, however the module is designed to be flexible and experimental. The module methodology also provides support in the exploration of research to provide contextual knowledge to the Final Major Project undertaken by final year students.

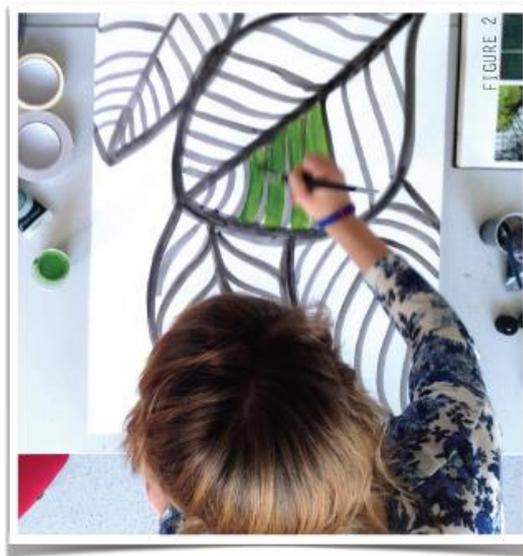
The lectures are delivered on a weekly basis, which introduce the students to design related topics, enabling them to pursue their understanding of the topic, and further research, which incorporates their specific professional practice and nuanced interpretation of the topic. This is documented by the students through both text and images on a digital blog/journal on NILE. The content is therefore built on a weekly basis, and then collated at the end of the term to form a final edited document for assessment.

The weekly blogging process enables the student to build their knowledge, research and creative awareness with increasing confidence and professionalism. Visiting guest speakers who deliver design-based workshops to students during their final year are incorporated to provide primary research for the blogs. Current exhibitions and documentaries are also introduced to ensure that cultural capital is developed with contemporary context.

The external examiners have noted that this module provides flexible and innovative academic and creative support to the final major design projects, and has generated extremely positive feedback from the students. It should be noted that the process of uploading digital content on a weekly basis enables students to manage their workload, and the tutor to monitor personal engagement and development.

The module also involves an essay, which is supported by an individual tutor, and the production of a final brochure/catalogue for display along with the student's final major project.

Examples of student work from 2014 are demonstrated below (Figures 8-11):



'Paul Smith: You Can Find
Inspiration in Everything - (And If
You Can't, Look Again)'
(ref.1)

Figure 8: Student work, by Alice Millin, 2014

SWOT Analysis



Figure 9: Student work, by Charly Jansson, 2014

As I am quite interested in **film** and **experimenting** with the possible relationship between moving image and textiles, I have presented my **50 words** in a short, quick moving film.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTr1LRS80Yk&feature=youtu.be>



Fig 7, a snapshot from my film of 50 words

Figure 10: Student work, by Charly Jansson, 2014

50 WORD & IMAGES

COMPOSITION
DIRECT 3 D
MOVEMENT
DISPOSITION
ABNORMAL
DISTORTION
ASYMMETRY
PRECISE
FRESH
MODERN
BOLD
ARCHITECTURE
ALIVE
DISTINGUISHED
ILLUSIONARY
DECONSTRUCTION
UNORTHODOX
COMPELLING
DEFINITIVE
ENGAGING
MINIMAL
DECEPTION
FORM
COMPLEX
ARRANGEMENT
FUNCTION
DYNAMIC
MANUFACTURE
ENERGETIC
DECONSTRUCTION
ABSTRACT
DRAMATIC
EFFECTIVE
JUXTAPOSITION
UNEXPECTED
SCULPTURAL
CONTEMPORARY
CONCEPTUAL
ABSTRACT
ORGANISATION
ANIMATED
MONOCHROME
STATEMENT

I AM CONTINUOUSLY CONSIDERING HOW THESE LINEAR FORMS CAN BE TRANSLATED INTO CLOTHING, FOR EXAMPLE THE LINE AND STRUCTURE OF ARCHITECTURAL BUILDINGS REMIND ME OF THE SEAMS IN A GARMENT. BY USING ONLY BLACK, WHITE AND Muted IMAGERY IN THIS POST AND KEEPING TO A VERY PRECISE AND BOLD LAYOUT, I AM LETTING THE IMAGES AND WORDS BE THE FOCAL POINT AND REALLY STAND OUT.

REFLECTING ON MY 50 WORDS AND IMAGES BOARD I CAN IDENTIFY STRONG THEMES OF PRECISION, FORM AND STRUCTURE THROUGHOUT. I HAVE CHOSEN WORDS SUCH AS CONCEPTUAL, MINIMAL AND STATEMENT AS I BELIEVE THEY REPRESENT ME MOST AS A DESIGNER. THIS STYLE OF GEOMETRIC IMAGERY REFLECTS VERY MUCH TO HOW I WORK AS I BELIEVE MY SKILLS LIE IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING GARMENTS; THEREFORE I SEE EVERYDAY OBJECTS IN LINEAR.



Figure 11: Student work, by Sophie Parker, 2014

Example 9

Using peer assessment to improve student engagement in practice

John Turnbull, Senior Lecturer in Learning Disability Nursing

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Peer assessment is often promoted as a means of improving student engagement in higher education (Falchikov, 2005), yet its use in nurse education in the UK has been limited (Casey et al., 2011). Where it has been used, examples mostly consist of assessment of academic performance in classroom settings. 50% of student nurse learning is designed to take place in practice, yet there are few examples of the use of peer assessment in practice. Where this has been attempted, studies have focused on performance of clinical skills such as hand washing and have taken place in simulated practice conditions (Rout and Roberts, 2008). Therefore, it would be useful to test the feasibility of using peer assessment in the practice setting itself.

Given this background, we plan to develop and trial peer assessment for the current Year 2 learning disability nursing cohort. There are 26 in the cohort but, for convenience, 8 of them will be selected to take part in the trial. The placement chosen

for the implementation of the peer assessment will be Placement Learning Opportunity Three which is an eleven week placement which will take place between March and May 2016. Students will visit another student's placement (and vice versa) for one day during week 4 in order to carry out their assessment. Mentors will be invited to participate in the co-design and implementation of the formative assessment. Their role would be to undertake an assessment simultaneously with the student assessor and provide feedback to the assessor as well as the student being assessed.

The main purpose of the assessment will be to promote student engagement with the placement, develop skills in giving and receiving feedback to peers and promote a positive attitude towards professional re-validation, soon to be a requirement in nursing. The detail of the assessment will be finalised in January 2016. It is envisaged that the assessment will focus around a particular 'event' led by the student, such as a meeting, handover, admission of a service user or the care of one service user throughout the day. Preparation of students will take place under simulated conditions in a classroom using peer observation and video to practice delivering feedback.

Evaluation of impact will take place through focus groups, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with students and mentors in 2016.

References:

Casey D. et al. (2011). Use of peer assessment as a student engagement strategy in nurse education. *Nursing and Health Sciences*, 13:514-520.

Falchikov N. (2005). *Aiding Learning in Higher and Further Education*. New York. Routledge.

Rout A. and Roberts P. (2008). Peer review in nursing: a literature review. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. 17(4):427-442.

Example 10

Using SPARKPlus for peer assessment with Events Management students

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Group work helps undergraduates build collaborative and teamwork skills that are valued by employers. However, one of the main issues associated with group work is the feeling of unfairness, especially with regards to 'free-riders'. To address this issue there is a strong argument for peers to assess each other based on individual contribution so that different grades can be awarded. Previous methods of peer assessment used have been time consuming and there has been no mechanism for the students to receive feedback from their peers.

Following extensive research it was found that there are many peer assessment tools available for students to assess each other's written work. However, very few exist that allow peers to assess each other based on their contribution to group work. The three tools investigated in detail were WebPA, CATME and SPARKPlus. Interviews were conducted with the founders/developers of each tool. Based on this research SPARKPlus was used in a trial.

SPARKPlus was used with second and final year BA Events Management students in semester 2 (14/15). In total 102 students used SPARKPlus alongside their final assessment, a post-event evaluation report.

A survey and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students. The main benefits perceived by the students and tutors were:

- SPARKPlus is easy for students and tutors to use
- It removes the need for paper-based peer assessment thus aiding the move to technology-enhanced learning at Waterside campus
- There is technical support from SPARKPlus and no data protection issues
- It enables students to assess each other in the comfort of their own home without any peer pressure associated with doing it in class
- It is anonymous and therefore students are able to provide honest feedback
- It allows tutors the flexibility to establish their own grading criteria

Due to these positive outcomes, NBS agreed to purchase the licence for SPARKPlus for a further year, in order to provide the opportunity to use it for formative and summative assessment throughout the academic year. I presented to colleagues University-wide and other schools will also be using this tool in 15/16.

Example 11

Using portfolios in Childhood and Youth Studies

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Second year students on BA Education Studies and BA Childhood and Youth Studies programmes completing the modules EDU2025 and EDU2025CY are challenged to identify a transition or life change significant to children and young people encountered during their work-based learning. They are required to develop a resource to empower children and young people to make this transition positively and smoothly.

Development	Primary and secondary research is completed to identify a transitional need and an appropriate resource to meet this need. This takes place within a work-based learning setting.
Rationale And Presentation	Students present a rationale and theoretical overview of their resource in the context of an exhibition to other students. Peer assessment and feedback inform the later stages of the assignment.
Design and Production	The resource is produced, involving consideration of cost, social impact and ethical factors.
Evaluation and Reflection	The resource is piloted with a group of young people within a work-based learning setting. A reflective evaluation of the journey from first ideas to findings of the pilot is completed. This includes consideration of strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for future branding and marketing.

Table 2: Transition resource design

A portfolio responding to the above stages and showcasing the final resource is submitted on Turnitin - students have been encouraged to merge their various documents into a single PDF document for upload.

The successful completion of the assignment provides students with a finite resource that can be further exploited at Level 6 in module EDU3031 through the development of a Social Enterprise initiative. Examples of successful resources include the production of an app to assist young people with eating disorders and a story book to support young people moving towards adoption.

Example 12

Developing a journal article to improve practical skills for Sociology students

Jo Downton, Associate Lecturer in Sociology

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Simon Thompson, Learning Technologist, LLS

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In the Love & Intimacy in the 21st Century module (SOC2009) a journal article of 2,000 words had been set as a final assignment, with students choosing a relevant topic, based on a core subject area.

Having been module leader for some considerable time, Jo was keen to introduce changes that would increase the employment relevance of the content and widen the research, linking students' research to contemporary issues. A new format was specifically introduced for the assignment, very similar to that of the *Sociological Review*. Students were encouraged to add relevant (copyright cleared) images and supplementary information (Signpost and Public Domain boxes supported the main article content, extending the academic references to other media). A Microsoft Word template was provided, along with a 40 minute familiarisation session in its use. Students were allowed to submit work using as few or as many features as they wished, but the visual impact of the piece was stressed and formed an element of the grading criteria.

Non-module staff (in this case a Learning Technologist and Librarian) supported the assignment by offering drop-in support to resolve research or technical issues. In practice, there was a low take-up.

The student submissions (see example in Figure 12) were reviewed by the module and subject leaders and were considered to be a significant improvement on previous years' assignments. The standard of academic writing was maintained, despite the apparent diversification of skills required and the novel layout. Students commented that they found the process quite demanding at times but far more fulfilling. The choice of titles and sub-headings were an added dimension and were often produced in an imaginative and attention-grabbing format.

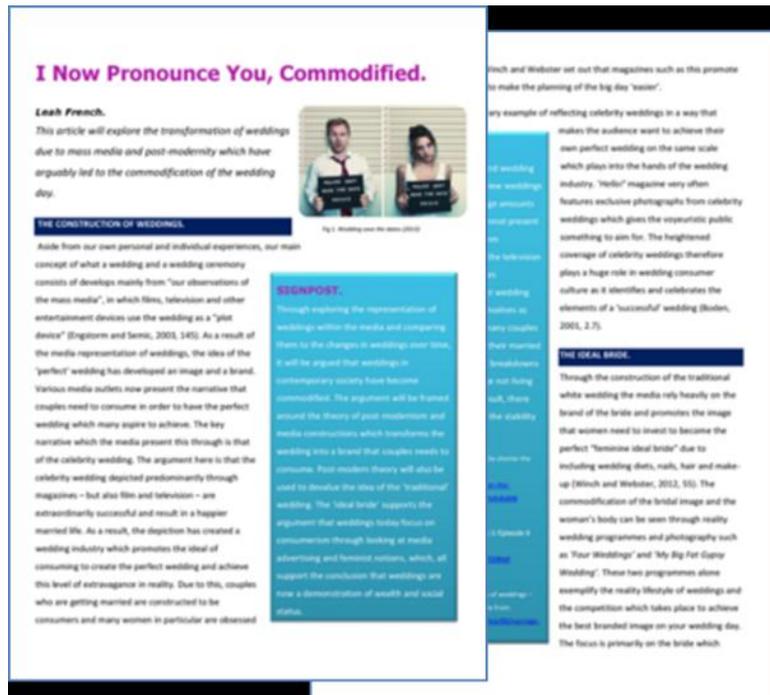


Figure 12: An example of student submission

Average grades improved from C+ to B- from 13/14 to 14/15, with the range of grades shifting upwards, though there are indications of possible polarisation, which need further investigation (see Figure 13).

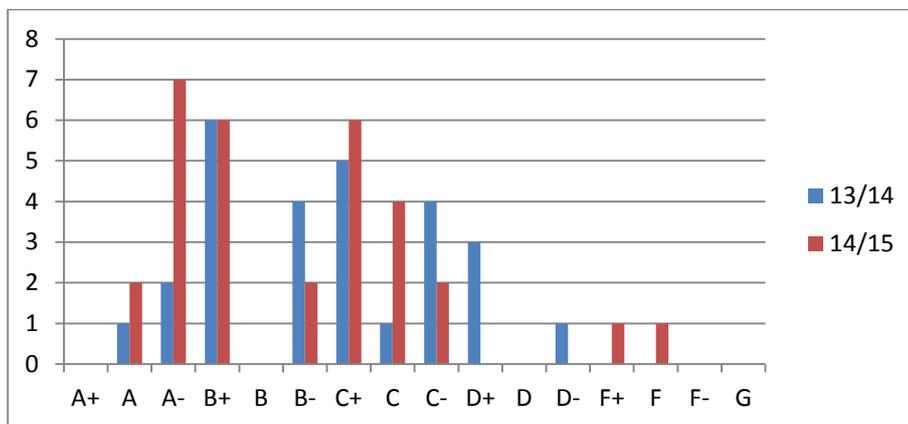


Figure 13: Grades for AS2 students, comparing 13/14 students (n = 27) and 14/15 students (n = 31)

Assignment related activities are being developed further for 15/16 – the University Changemaker Hub (formerly known as UCEE) will support a job application form for the post of Social Science Researcher (with an optional practice interview).

Blog posting skills have also been added and peer review has also been incorporated into the development process for the assignment. Students will also document the research trail using a journal style format.

In an associated first year module, blogging and peer review skills are being incorporated to give students more confidence in the collaborative elements of the assignment.

In the future, we hope to extend the assignment to become part of a self-published professional journal.

Example 13

Involving students in assessment design

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The student experience is central to teaching and learning and trying to maintain engagement on modules is a priority as research and anecdotal evidence suggests that students who attend and engage perform better. We are conducting a project to evaluate the impact of using teaching and learning methods which empower students and involve them as partners in the design and delivery of a module. More specifically, in the project students will be involved in designing their own assessments. The project will evaluate whether empowering students and giving them a sense of greater ownership of their work and involvement in the design of the module impacts upon their engagement and perceptions of the work as 'theirs'. This project therefore looks to shift the power dynamics in the module in order to empower the students and involve them more fully in the teaching and learning process.

There will be a consideration of how the use of such innovative assessment methods impacts on academic integrity and students' perceptions of assessments and academic integrity. It is proposed by some researchers that a key driver behind students choosing to commit plagiarism is that they become disengaged with the learning process and choose to prioritise other activities. This project will also evaluate the impact of early engagement in the assessment process on this sense of distance. To what extent a concerted and focused effort to involve the students in their own learning process, and in particular the assessments, has an impact on academic integrity? Does the involvement and the empowerment of students give them a sense of ownership of their work which discourages plagiarism?

Students will be in self-selecting teams and will be given a task to complete in term 2 of 15/16 which is based on an experiential learning model. The way the teams address this task and the knowledge they may need in order to do so will be identified by the teams, with some guidance from the tutors. The task will link in to their final pieces of assessment which leads into the second aspect of this project.

The role of the students in the design of the assessment is 4-fold:

1. They will be able to choose their own essay question for the 2,000-word assignment based on what has been covered in the workshops in term 1.
2. They are able to choose their own group members, focus and approach to the task which has been set for the Group Project.

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3. Students will have input in the lectures/seminars/workshops which will be run in term 2 by identifying the areas they need information on to help them complete their assessments. It is this information which I will use to guide the teaching and activities in term 2. All of term 2 feeds directly into the group project.
 4. Students have the opportunity to feed back and reflect on the operation of the group project via the 1,000-word reflective exercise.

Evaluation of the impact of this approach will take place with the students and tutors towards the end of term 2 in 2016.

Example 14

Architectural Technology students develop material for History and Heritage app

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The creation of the app and website for Follow Northampton (<http://follownorthampton.co.uk/>), exploring the History and Heritage of Northampton (a project devised by Drew Gray, Senior Lecturer in History and Sabine Coady Schaebitz, Director CCBE), has been supported by students from a number of subjects: History, Architectural Technology, Education and Graphic Design. In 2014/15 the participation formed part of an assignment for the architectural technology students.

The project assignment constituted 40% of a 20-credit module at level 5. The module's overall focus was on historical architectural design and materials. For this assignment students were provided with a range of buildings to choose from and, depending on the size and complexity they were required to research either two or three buildings with regard to their history, including design, construction, function and current state. The format of the outcome was prescribed: as a minimum they were required to produce 600 words of text, 2 x good quality photographs and 1 x CAD (Computer-Aided Design) drawing. Students had the opportunity to discuss their choices and findings in the studio, but beyond that the research itself and the visual presentation was essentially self-directed. Some students were initially disheartened if archive material and 'answers' weren't readily available on the internet. However this reinforced the understanding that they really had to go out and research their chosen examples. Soon the students rose to the challenge and as their confidence grew, the results in most cases reflected their engagement, assessing numerous sources including the county archive and the local studies library as well as their own observation and recording skills.

Overall, most students found the assignment both challenging and interesting and liked the idea of their work being made publicly available. The group as a whole developed a better appreciation for the historically very varied urban fabric in towns such as Northampton, and also some of the sources available for their study. Many were struck

by the extent of change to buildings through time, and the amount of modern additions if not protected through listing. By consciously applying knowledge acquired in lectures to real life examples and with a real life outcome, students not only gained a greater understanding of and research skills for the built environment as a professional subject, but also learned to appreciate it as a living environment:

"I really found this project exciting, being a person who has lived in Northampton pretty much all his life. I wasn't actually aware of some of the buildings...I didn't know the history behind most of the buildings and I was really intrigued with my findings..."
(Misbah Uddin, Y2 student).

Example 15

Using Essay Feedback Checklist to engage students with feedback

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This trial has been applied to first year Human Resource Management students at Northampton Business School. Good feedback practice should involve the development of reflection in learning (self-assessment) which helps tutors and students to clarify what is good performance by identifying the desirable criteria or standards (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Achieving these objectives requires a way of communicating between tutors and students which helps the students to be aware of the assessment criteria and that helps the tutors to provide the expected feedback in line with students' expectations. I started to introduce the Essay Feedback Checklist (EFC) to first year Business students to explore how they understand the marking criteria we use and to start using an interactive two-way communication tool between tutors and students. My objective was to improve first year students' self-confidence in writing essays through engaging them with a dialogue about the essay feedback. The generation of this research idea was based on a concern that first year students do not understand the assessment criteria for their essays and therefore are not confident with the level of their work.

Students found the EFC a useful tool to support engagement with the feedback; for improving their confidence to use the feedback to develop their work further and for creating an interactive environment in providing feedback and helping to open a dialogue about it, but they also highlighted some drawbacks regarding what these criteria mean and how they can achieve high marks. The results also support the idea that the information provided on a student's progress through feedback has the capacity to turn each item of assessed work into an instrument to further develop that student's learning (Hyland, 2000).

Students also confirmed that using a tool to clarify the marking criteria and allow them to evaluate their effort accordingly helped them to engage with the feedback process more effectively. This also encourages students to take some specific actions on how to improve their writing (for example, how to evaluate different arguments). The findings of this trial support the argument that students prefer an interactive tool to understand the marking criteria and be more involved in the assessment process.

References:

Hyland, P. (2000). Learning from feedback on assessment. In P. Hyland (eds.) *The Practice of University History Teaching*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Nicol, D. & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2):199-218. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070600572090>.

Example 16

Problem-based assessment in Engineering – making the ‘boring’ exciting!

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Engaging engineering students in what they often consider to be uninteresting ‘non engineering’ less important topics, such as quality, standards, customer requirements, ethics, sustainability can be problematic. However, our industry partners, accrediting organisations and the QAA regard the understanding of these areas as essential to the development of the ‘well rounded’ employable engineer.

Feedback shows engineering students ‘love’ practical activities and it is widely recognized that learning through doing is a powerful tool to enhance understanding and engagement. Given the above, a problem-based design and build task was introduced.

Students, working in teams, have to design and build a golf club for a ‘real’ customer. They have to collectively research and agree a specification and then build the club. As part of this process they have the opportunity to take advantage of an industry visit and question an expert and see how technology is used within this sector. Assessment is an individual report reflecting upon the activity and the product they have made. Within this they have to consider, engineering principles, core module topic areas, group and individual performance.

Why a golf club? All first year engineering students undertake this module, many of whom have had little exposure to engineering in practice. A golf club is a widely recognised product. It is simple in the number of parts, but from an engineering perspective it is complex, a complexity which is increased when individual requirements are factored in. Students are able control the complete design, build and test process from beginning to end within a relatively short time period. Once complete the products can be disassembled and reused with limited waste.

Student engagement and satisfaction has improved, overall satisfaction was 100% achieving 1.9 or better in all categories. First-sit pass rate for 2015 was 93%.

Typical student comments stated:

“The assessment was very interesting by involving a practical aspect with a concise report.”

“The golf club project was good because it got the group involved.”

“... he can make a very boring subject interesting.”

Additional benefits of this project included supporting our recent successful professional accreditation through the IMechE (the Institution of Mechanical Engineers) and engaging students through our STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) activities.

This activity has taken time and resource to set up, but the resulting benefits have made it very worthwhile.