

LSIS Practitioner Enquiry: Facilitating student ownership of the assessment process

LSIS Research



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Background

This enquiry took place at Hereford College of Arts, which is a specialist arts college situated in the compact city of Hereford, close to the Welsh English border. The college also services students from surrounding counties. Around 100 students enrol on the Foundation Diploma each year (80 Foundation students and 20 mature students-Portfolio Course), the course is accredited by the University of the Arts London (UAL). The Foundation Diploma is a one-year diagnostic Art and Design level 3-4 qualification preparing students for study at HE. A new course leader and structure led to an overhaul of the assessment process, which has helped us to achieve valuable and immediate student involvement in, and ownership of, assessment.

Starting point

Historically, students submitted work to a deadline and then didn't see their tutor again for two weeks while their work was assessed and individual feedback given. Student questionnaires, focus groups and anecdotal evidence told us that we needed to improve this process. Learners felt that the feedback did not always help them clarify how to improve and took too long to receive. Two weeks dedicated to assessment, considering there are 3 assessment points in a year, was simply too long. An internal review also highlighted variations in feedback from different members of staff, indicating the need for standardisation.

Looking at research on Assessment for Learning approaches (see further

reading) highlighted for us the benefits of students working collaboratively at assessment points. It helps learners to:

- see evidence of good practice in the work of others
- develop presentation skills
- evaluate their own and each other's progress
- negotiate their own targets and assessment grade
- have more contact time with their tutors.

We could see that a new approach had the potential to move assessment from being a summative process, something that was "done to" the learner resulting in an assigned grade, to a process that actively involves the learners and supports further learning within the process itself. With this in mind we drew up a new model for assessment.

Teaching and learning process

Before the learners come to the timetabled group assessment they complete a pre-session self-assessment task. They are given guidance on how to do this. They prepare for the group assessment session by identifying evidence of the learning outcomes such as using post-it notes in their sketchbooks. They are expected to present in their session; evidence of research, ideas development, drawing, practical skills, evaluation and reflection. They also complete a self-assessment document digitally, which forms an important part of the overall assessment document.

The assessment sessions last for 1 ¼ hours, with 4 sessions per day. Each session comprises of four learners and two tutors, one tutor typing up the comments in real time, while the other chairs the session. This keeps the pace focussed, on time and on task and creates a professional and purposeful environment. Learners present individually for 10-15 minutes, followed by peer comment and dialogue facilitated by the tutors. Learners can immediately identify their strengths and weaknesses. They acknowledge any gaps, and work together to develop strategies for improvement in a fair and supportive environment. Everyone is responsible for negotiating the final grade and setting smart targets for improvement. Self, peer and staff assessment

comments and targets, are captured on the assessment document and emailed to the student directly after the session.

The sessions are also digitally voice recorded allowing students to access the feedback again on mp3 file. The UAL chief examiner has confirmed that recordings are acceptable as assessment evidence. This is particularly valuable for learners who articulate more effectively than they write. We now offer voice and video recordings to learners as an alternative way to document their reflection and evaluation.

Impact

Learner questionnaire data collected at the end of the course revealed that:

- 98% of Foundation and Portfolio learners agreed that the criteria used in marking and assessing work is made clear in advance (compared to 88% the previous year).
- 98% of Foundation and Portfolio learners agreed that feedback on their work helped them clarify things that they did not understand (compared to 82% the previous year).

Learner comments included:

- *'The criteria used in marking are made clear in advance'*.
- *'Assessment arrangements and marking are fair and consistent'*.

- *'Feedback on my work is well organised and timely'*.
- *'I receive detailed comments on my work'*.
- *'Feedback on my work helps me clarify things I did not understand'*.

The new assessment model has proved to be very successful. It has obvious benefits for teaching and learning and also saves time, assessments are now completed in one week rather than two. Assessing in pairs promotes parity and good practice across the staff team. On the Foundation diploma we now use this method routinely and it has also been adopted by other FE courses at Hereford College of Arts.

Further Reading

Alvarez, S. (2010) Assessing grey matters: joint practice development of everyday work in the classroom. National Teacher Research Panel summary. Available at: www.ntrp.org.uk/content/assessing-grey-matters-joint-practice-development-everyday-work-classroom

Torrance, H. et al. (2005) The impact of different modes of assessment on achievement and progress in the learning and skills sector. Learning and Skills Research Centre. Available at: www.itslifejimbutnotas.weknowit.org.uk/files/AssessmentModesImpact.pdf

Contact

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