Faculty of Education: Educational & Professional Studies

The traditional B Ed 1 Educational and Professional Studies module 'Learners and Learning' was a 20 lecture course accommodating around 170 students. Assessment included 10 sets of independent study tasks (each set contained a series of independent study tasks and resulting tutorial activities). Formative assessment include informal assessment of student portfolios while summative assessment incorporated one end of year exam comprising 50 multiple choice questions and one 'seen' article to be critically analysed.

Transformation

The course redesign for session (2006-7) included a self and peer assessment methodology supported by tutor mediation to provide formative assessment associated with identified 'learning milestones' throughout the year. The redesigned activities utilised collaborative techniques and principles of social constructivism to increase student engagement with tasks and content; facilitate greater and more timely feedback; improve pacing and time on task; and remove an end of module marking burden from staff.

Results

Anecdotal evidence from staff interviews and focus group indicate that students in this year's cohort were considerable more autonomous and confident in their approach to learning than in the traditional format and were more likely to seek tutor formative feedback. They also appeared to be more reflective on their learning due to active peer engagement and debate. Group cohesion appeared to be increased through standardisation of seminar groups over different modules and increased electronic and physical peer contact via PebblePad software facility. Both tutor and peer dialogue appeared to increase learning and students appeared to be more motivated and committed than in previous course iterations and take tasks more seriously. Social cohesion was also considered to have improved. The technology appeared to enhance the alignment between assessments and students' time on task appeared to be increased and more evenly distributed.

Staff acted on student feedback when possible by following up in tutorials or seeking lecturer advice but felt they and the students would have benefited from the opportunity to compare tutor feedback across groups.

Qualitative and quantitative evidence from the student focus group and questionnaire found that group work and written/spoken peer/tutor feedback rewarding, even in the case of indirect feedback to a chosen sub-group but they requested more individual feedback and increased staff monitoring in core tasks in light of some instances of social loafing. When groups operated well students found the process to be very supportive and beneficial. They welcome the opportunity to work autonomously but requested more robust scaffolded support during the process, particularly win making links between course components. They considered the new system to offer them more flexibility in their learning but felt that there needed to be more consistency between tutorial groups in terms of provision of criteria and feedback. Students were more concerned about transparency of effort than privacy in Pebblepad although there were some indications that the private facility may be useful for non-assessed entries. Students on the whole agreed that assessed tasks were engaging them in learning activities that were compatible with the course content lecture material.

In terms of efficiency, tutors agreed with course leaders that there were clear benefits in providing feedback to one sub-group on a given core task rather than to individual students,

but that the potential for further benefits could be fully realized once technical issues had been fully addressed.

Strategic development plans include increased matching of core tasks to tutorials to achieve a greater consistency across tutor groups, decreased seminar slots to reduce staff time on task, the introduction of formal peer assessment and a revision of the current software platform.

Critical success factors

Course leaders considered that central to the enhancement of the personal learning experience of each student was the blended learning approach illustrated by the synthesis of lectures with the PebblePad VLE, the e-portfolio, and the staff seminar contact. Critical success factors included the repeated cycle of task submissions, peer feedback, reflection, resubmission and timely tutor feedback as well as the assumed responsibility of each student to post their individual submissions on time, be accountable to peers and for collating and posting the group response on one occasion during the year. Quality of staff feedback was enhanced through efficiency savings in staff marking time. The explicit expectation on the students to be self-regulated in their learning approach was seen as being central to success. Peer formative feedback facilitated active engagement and the distribution and incremental progression of tasks throughout the year enabled the even distribution of effort and appropriate matching of tasks to ability. The enthusiasm and support of tutors and course leaders motivated the students and the flexibility of the online system facilitated greater time management, autonomy and social cohesion.

Future progress and strategic development

Course development ideas have included matching the core tasks more closely to tutorials in order to achieve a greater consistency across tutor groups in criteria provision and feedback. Discussions have included the possibility of trialling a more public system for group submissions, which would make it easier for tutors to monitor individual submissions.

To maximise efficiency, plans have been formulated to reduce staffed seminar slots from 8 to 6, saving a further 32 hours of staff time.

Suggestions from the tutor focus group included the idea that it may be useful to build formal opportunities for peer formative feedback into the course. This could be group to group feedback. One tutor noted that this may be useful to increase the quality of the feedback. Although tutors believed that there was a facility to offer this on the Pebblepad system, they agreed that students had not been encouraged to use it or to do any more than simply read other group's feedback.

The idea of peer assessment is consistent with ideas discussed with the course leaders in response to the problem of social loafing. One idea that may be trialled if the private space on the PebbplePad platform is to be retained, is to have the students grade one another in terms of effort and contribution to group tasks. This would force students to be more accountable to groups members and may help to encourage some students to take more responsibility for their own learning and for their duty to their peers.

Dissemination

Magnus Ross and Mary Welsh have both been involved in extensive dissemination activities to promote awareness about the ED111 course redesign.

They have presented the mid-point initiative at a scholarly community within the department and intend to present it once again after its conclusion at a teaching and learning quality improvement group. They have also had discussions with other departments within the university including the Psychology department who have implemented an

intervention with some similar aspects as well as interest from the Engineering department n. More widely, they had recently presented a paper at conference in Brazil. They have also had a paper accepted for ESCALATE (Higher Educations Academy's education forum) in May 2007. In addition, they have applied to ESER (European association) for September 2007 and submitted a preliminary enquiry to the Journal of Higher Teaching and Education, who they reported appeared to be interested in doing an article on the redesign. Further than they have had notification of SERA (Scottish Education & Research Association) conference next year in November in Perth Scotland for which they intend to submit an abstract.