

‘Innovation and the student experience’ Discussion paper proposal form

30 minute session including questions / discussion

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Theme:	Research-informed teaching OR Assessment & feedback
Title of Paper:	Formative, peer and summative assessment of MSc dissertation research proposals using a research poster event

Abstract:

Problem statement/rationale, including reference to key literature:
Rapid growth in size and diversity of two key research-led MSc programmes, and a search for ways to improve: feedback to students, students’ transferable skills and the overall student experience, led to identification of a need to develop innovative ways to support students early the dissertation process. Previously students made Powerpoint presentations of research proposals to two examiners. Students are now examined by presenting posters of their proposals at a large poster day event.
Research design and methods of data collection and analysis or method inquiry:
As the purpose was to reform the organisational process of the MSc dissertation proposal assessment and feedback, action learning was adopted in this case (Heller, 2004). Validation for the improvements over the individual Powerpoint presentation has been achieved through ongoing discussions with all participants (Heller, 2004) (staff and students).
Main findings:

Students receive strong formative feedback during an interactive exchange with examiners followed by summative feedback and are encouraged to engage in a competitive formative peer review with a group of 5-6 other students; the students providing the most useful feedback to colleagues are awarded small prizes. Feedback and results indicate that students enjoy the experience and learning is improved. The day engenders a buzz amongst the student body that individual presentations do not and it is a course highlight: students take photographs and share their experiences on social media. The day is developing increasing recognition throughout the university and last year the VC visited. After the event, students use feedback from the event to complete and submit a research proposal report.

Discussion of implications:

Historically students' research proposals were assessed individually by two examiner, via twenty minute presentations followed by Q&A sessions. At the poster day students present their work in a great hall in batches of 70-80 students in a morning or afternoon session. The visual medium of a poster facilitates students in their process of deconstructing the literature and synthesising it into a contribution (Smallbone and Quinton, 2011). The process allows them to see the standard of work being presented by their peers and makes the process visibly competitive. It also allows them to learn from interactions of their peers with examiners. Although only two examiners formally examine their work, the visible involvement (and sometimes comments) from senior academics in the hall is important for the holistic learning experience.

The peer review process encourages students to critically apply theories to others' work and this generates additional feedback that they would not otherwise have received. The process of reviewing a colleagues' work engenders a successful form of action learning (Heller, 2004). The whole assessment process provides experiential learning which has been shown to support learning effectiveness and better integration of a diverse student body (Piercy and Caldwell, 2011). The focused active learning process enables students to practise a different form of communication to the norm used on the courses and improves employability and practitioner skills, making them more capable of dealing with different situations (Ross, 2011). The task is; "original, meaningful and interesting" and thus "students engage in the learning process" and develop transferable skills (Morris, 2011, p.5).

List of key references/resources:

- Heller, F. (2004) "Action Research and Research Action: A Family of Methods", in Cassell, C. and Symon, G. (eds.) Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research, London: Sage, chapter 28, pp.349-360.
- Morris, E. (2011) "Graduate impact, student employability and academic integrity", in Kemp, P. and Atfield, R. (eds.) Enhancing graduate impact in business and management, hospitality, leisure, sport, tourism, Newbury: Threshold Press Ltd, p.1-8.
- Piercy, N. and Caldwell, N. (2011) "Experiential learning in the international classroom: Supporting learning effectiveness and integration", The International Journal of Management Education, 9 (2), pp. 25-35.
- Smallbone, T. and Quinton, S. (2011) "A three-stage framework for teaching literature reviews: A new approach." The International Journal of Management Education, 9 (4), pp. 1-11).
- Ross, S. (2011) "A three-stage framework for teaching literature reviews: A new approach." The International Journal of Management Education, 9 (4), pp. 39-49).

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references):

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