

Preparing For 'Live' Assessment; The Student Learning Journey

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Background

The annual Nutrition Fair is a real or 'live' assessment for final year Nutrition students who are studying the module Applied Nutrition 2. The staged assessment package takes students on a learning journey (see figure 1) involving the planning, preparation for and delivery of a stall for the fair on a topic relevant to nutrition and health. The fair attracts a large number of visitors from within and outside of the University, including many employers.

Whether real or 'live' assessment promotes learner autonomy is of interest. In order to take responsibility for learning, individuals must feel they have control over whether they will succeed or fail (Dickinson, 1995). Once learner autonomy is established, learner motivation is enhanced (Dickinson, 1995), though clearly, a prerequisite to enhanced motivation towards a task is self-confidence or self-belief (Dörnyei, 1998).

Aim

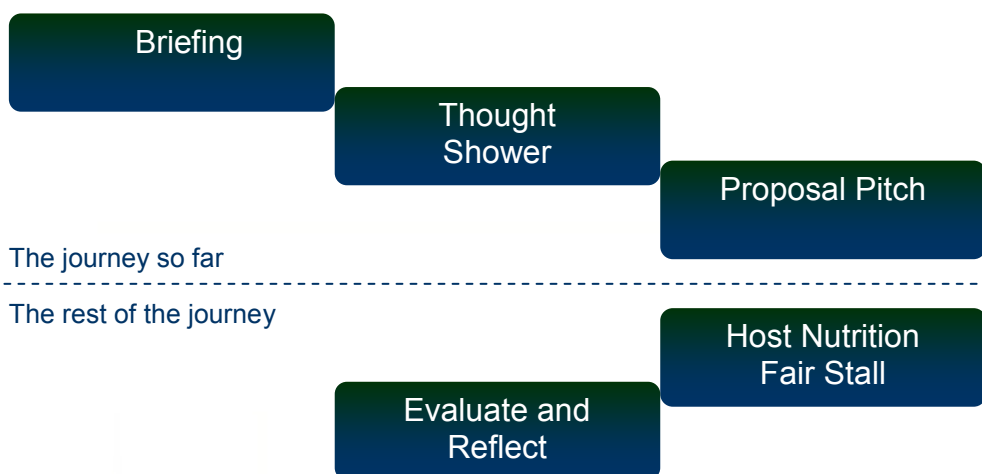
This project aims to evaluate 'live' assessment for Nutrition students by exploring student experiences during a learning journey designed to promote learner autonomy.

Current Progress

The entire journey is detailed in figure 1. Visual analogue scales have been used to ascertain the level of control at various critical time points in the learning journey so far as a marker of readiness for autonomy in learning. Learners' levels of confidence and motivation (determined concomitantly and in the same way) are presented to show progress towards becoming autonomous in their learning.

Learner engagement with the evaluation task has been good. For each factor at each measurement point engagement ranged from between 63/65 to 65/65 learners.

Fig. 1: The Learning Journey



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Fig. 2: The Student Learning Journey So Far

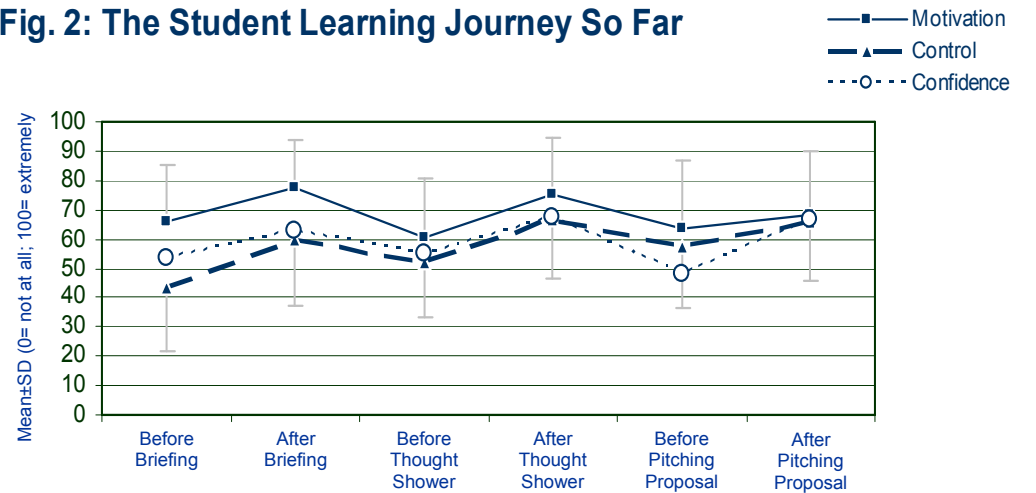


Figure 2 shows mean levels of control, confidence and motivation for the group before and after critical milestones in the journey so far. It is clear that levels of all three factors are elevated following each milestone but fall between tasks. Not surprisingly, learners perceive low levels of control initially but gain increasing control over their journey as it progresses.

Overall, learners' confidence levels improve, though there is a noticeable drop in confidence prior to their proposal 'pitch' (the first formally assessed milestone), however these pre-task 'nerves' appear to have settled after the 'pitch'. Motivation remains buoyant throughout but is higher when learners feel more in control and more confident.

Intriguingly, the learners, for the first time, are currently demonstrating almost identical levels of control, confidence and motivation

What Next?

As the learners move into the next stage of the learning journey it will be interesting to see how control, confidence and motivation alter.

The next phase of investigation will employ focus groups to ascertain in detail how 'live' assessment affects learners and staff, and how the public and employers engage with 'live' student activities. Further analysis of the existing data aims to group learners using demographic data collected at the beginning of the journey and to map perceived control, confidence and motivation against performance overall and in individual assessed tasks.

References

- Dickinson, L. (1995). Autonomy and motivation. *System* 23; 165-74.
Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language Teaching* 31; 117-35.