

Motivation, control and confidence in 'live' assessment; a learning journey

Jenny Paxman (SBS)



Paxman, Jenny R.¹, Hall, Anna C.¹ and Thomas, Val G.¹

¹ Food Group, Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University, S1 1WB

Contact; j.r.paxman@shu.ac.uk, +44 (0)114 2253319

Many thanks to Emma Cadman, student assistant to the project.

Background

Throughout their final year Nutrition students studying the module Applied Nutrition 2 prepare to host a stall at the annual Nutrition Fair. This real or 'live' assessment uses a five-staged learning journey model (see **Figure 1**) and involves students in planning and preparing for then hosting a stall on a self-chosen topic relevant to health and nutrition. There were approximately 440 visitors to the 2009 Nutrition Fair including the general public, University staff, employers from various external agencies, a local school and University students from both local universities.

There is a dearth of published literature assessing the importance of 'live' assessment in the context of learner autonomy. It has been identified that experienced based learning (EBL) is associated with increased learner self-concept (Andresen et al, 1995). Where learners accept responsibility for their own learning this breeds a positive attitude towards learning and the ability to adequately reflect on learning experiences in order to bring them under conscious control (Little, 1995). Dickinson (1995) states that where individuals are actively and independently involved in their own learning they are more motivated to learn and demonstrate greater learning effectiveness.

Rationale

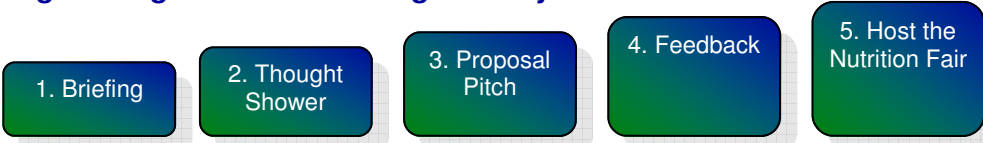
This project aimed to evaluate 'live' assessment for Nutrition students by exploring the student experiences during a learning journey designed to promote learner autonomy. Levels of motivation, control and confidence were measured throughout.

Method

In total, 65 students took part in the Nutrition Fair itself and were required to complete a number of questionnaires including one on demographics and learning styles, and a visual analogue based questionnaire at critical stages of the learning journey outlined in **Figure 1**. These 'before and after' questionnaires examined the students' levels of motivation, confidence and control at the specific time points throughout the 'live' assessment. Data from questionnaires was coded and analysed using SPSS.

As well as completing questionnaires, 6 students also attended a focus group where they were asked open ended questions to established how the Nutrition Fair, as a form of assessment, is perceived by students and could be improved in the future. Themes from this focus group are reported in outcomes.

Fig. 1: Stages of the Learning Journey

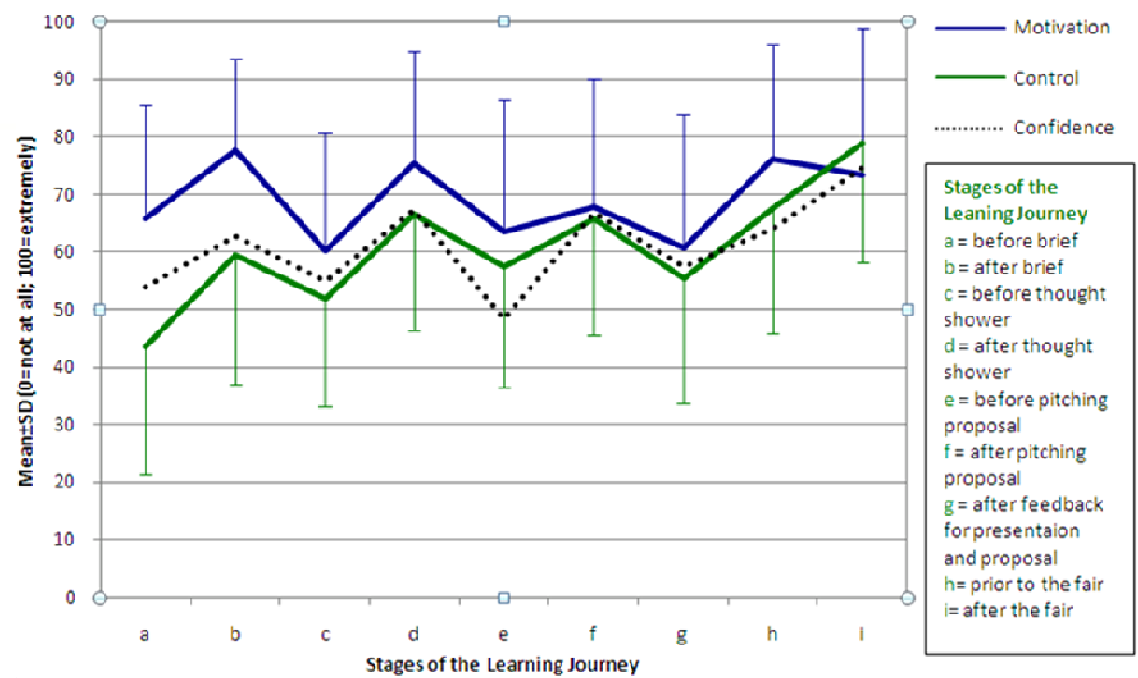


Outcomes

Figure 2 shows mean levels of motivation, control and confidence at the various stages of the learning journey outlined in **Figure 1**. The graph shows that throughout the journey motivation remained relatively high, though learners generally demonstrated greater levels of motivation following the completion of each stage. Unsurprisingly, there were highly significant increases in mean reported levels of both control and confidence from stage 'a' (before brief) to stage 'i' (after the fair; $p < .0005$ and $p < .0005$, respectively). From stage 'a' (before brief) to stage 'h' (prior to the fair), reported means for all three factors of motivation, control and confidence significantly increased ($p < .0005$, $p = .007$ and $p = .002$, respectively).

Interestingly, in terms of performance in the Nutrition Fair assessment tasks, on average females achieved significantly higher marks in the proposal pitch (worth 20%; $p = .020$) and overall (100%; $p = .023$) but there were no significant between-gender differences in marks awarded for the written business proposal (worth 30%) or the Nutrition Fair itself (worth 50%).

Fig. 2: The Student Learning Journey



Females were significantly more motivated than males following the initial briefing ($p = .002$) but at no other stage. There were no significant differences in mean levels of perceived control or confidence between genders at any stage.

Students can study this module from three different BSc routes: Food and Nutrition (F&N), Public Health Nutrition (PHN) and Nutrition, Health and Lifestyle (NHL). F&N students are most likely to have completed a placement year. PHN students achieved significantly higher marks than NHL students at the Nutrition Fair itself ($p = .023$). F&N students' marks at the Nutrition fair did not differ significantly from the other those achieved by students on the other routes. There were no other significant differences in marks achieved by students studying different routes. When comparing levels of motivation, control and confidence between the routes at different stages, it was interesting to note that the PHN students, relative to the F&N students, were significantly less motivated before the thought shower ($p = .024$), significantly less in control and less confident after the thought shower ($p = .009$ and $p = .005$, respectively) and significantly less confident after receiving feedback from the proposal stages ($p = .013$). There were no other significant differences in motivation, control or confidence between routes.

Comments from the student focus group were varied but certain comments mirrored the students' learning journey (see **Figure 2**). After the brief students felt "excited" demonstrated by the high levels of motivation at this stage. Once they had started their topic after the thought shower they felt a little "confused" and reported this as "quite scary". The students suggested that the proposal pitch was "formal" and they had "never done it before" which could account for the very low levels of confidence reported before the proposal pitch. On the day of the Fair the students were "frantic" and felt they were "running on adrenaline". It is interesting to note that these feelings coincided with relatively high levels of motivation, however.

Overall the students felt that the experience had helped them to develop a number of key skills and competencies including how to "work under pressure...and how to relate to the public", develop "face to face confidence", to be "more independent" as well as other "transferable skills".

Overall, the learning journey for this 'live' assessment leads to high levels of motivation, control and confidence prior to the final assessment. Some students may find this journey as learners more rewarding than others. This may depend on gender or BSc route of study.

References

- Andresen, L. Boud, D. & Cohen, R. (1995). In Foley, G. (Ed.). *Understanding Adult Education and Training*. Second Edition. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Dickinson, L. (1995). Autonomy and motivation. *System*. 31; 117-35.
- Little, D. (1995). Learning as dialogue: the dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy. *System*. 23; 175-181.

