

Developing the Virtual Learning Environment



Commenced: 2005

What is it?

The project aims to introduce new assessment practices, including improved feedback to enhance student learning, into the Social Sciences programme within the criminology route. Feedback matrices will be produced with colleagues for a variety of modules allowing quicker and more effective feedback to complement individual feedback. Portfolio/Jigsaw assessment will also be initiated as part of the move towards assessment for learning within the subject area.

Scenario

James has not gained the mark he expected for an assessment. Feedback is individual and supportive but does not locate his work within a range of other learning performances. Feedback matrices with ordered statements relating to key assessment criteria are provided so that, next time, James can see exactly what was needed, on a range of criteria, to be improved and how. This is in addition to personal feedback which comments on issues related more to subject content. In future the feedback matrix is provided as part of the assessment briefing earlier in the briefing.

Later in the course...

James has created his own project for an area of interest. Within an independent study module, guided by a tutor and working as part of a team of students, he has created a project brief, detailed assessment criteria and planned to create a high quality project report.

What is involved?

Staff cultures can reflect disciplined understandings of the importance of subject knowledge. Engaging learners in the process of constructing their own knowledge challenges academic practice in defining the boundaries and methods of studying. Real world scenarios, particularly related to students' experience of crime and disorder, can ground assessment in the criminology's of everyday life. Thus staff can engage learners in the applications of theory, research and policy in the world round them. More than this, staff can bring the feedback process forward to enable to students to gain insights into the expectations of academic practice before final marks are awarded for work. This is embedded in portfolio and jigsaw approaches to assessment where the complexities of construction and student teaching activities lead to clarification of expectations.

Why is the project important to the CETL and the University?

Autonomy is situated within institutional and discipline contexts. Enabling students to take responsibility for their learning needs changes in the behaviour of staff. Assessment, as a key driver for student learning and staff energy, provides a strategic vehicle for change. Staff may well be open to processes that use less time and yet enhance student achievement. Enabling students to locate their own experiences and interests in the subject matter is one aspect of change and the other is staff providing insights into their expectations for assessment performances.

What do you hope the project will achieve?

Starting with just four modules within the criminology route colleagues will be engaged in activities which may enhance their own and the student experience.

Future Developments

Beyond the first year, colleagues and other initiatives as part of the CETL, will be supported in developing this project (e.g. Assessment for Autonomy, E-Learning, 'At elbow' assessment support).

Jargon Buster

Jigsaw assessment

Breaks learning in to manageable chunks and allows students to teach each other.

Portfolio assessment

Is where a variety of materials are used to evidence the achievement of learning often accompanied by a reflective account which links them to specific outcomes.

Links

Baume, D., Yorke, M. and Coffey, M. (2004) What is happening when we assess, and how can we use our understanding of this to improve assessment? *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 29, 4, 451

Gibbs, G. and Simpson, C. (2002) Does your assessment support your students learning? Milton Keynes: Open University. Available at, <http://www.open.ac.uk/science/fdtl/documents/lit-review.pdf> Accessed 22 February, 2006.

Harris, P. and MacDonald, R.(2005) *Towards Profile Assessment*. Sheffield Hallam University.

O'Leary, C. (2005) *Smarter Assessment Project Report—Phase 2*. Sheffield Hallam University.

Race, P. (2005) *Making Learning Happen: a guide for post-compulsory education*. London: Sage.

Contact details

Richard Lynch
0114 225 4398
r.lynch@shu.ac.uk

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Please contact us for details.