

SEDA Autumn Conference 2024



Session Title: Challenging grading practices: Grading, harm and compassion

Session Type: Research Papers (20 minutes)

Main presenter(s): Neil Carrant, University of Bedfordshire

Co presenter(s): Vikki Hill, Queen Margaret University. Liz Bunting, University of the Arts London. Emily Salines, Queen Mary University London.

Session Summary: Qualitative research was undertaken with first-and second-year undergraduate students in creative arts, design and communication to investigate the effects of the switch from letter grading to pass/fail and student views on grading more generally. Our findings suggest that grading affects student stress, anxiety, learner identity, motivation, student self-expression, creativity, and peer relationships. This paper will discuss the implications for supporting academic colleagues and adapting university policy to address the student wellbeing challenges of grading.

Session Outline: Session outline

- Introduction to the affective impact of grading and pass / fail assessment.
- Share research findings conducted at the University of the Arts London.
- Discuss implications for how educational developers can support academic colleagues interested in implementation pass / fail and taking a compassionate approach to assessment and grading.
- Discuss implications to address the student wellbeing challenges and negative impacts of grading.
- Discuss implications for how educational developers might shape policy to allow for more flexible approaches to grading and pass / fail that are compassionate and support student wellbeing.
- Question and Answer.

Key issues to be addressed:

The affective impact of grading: Our findings suggest that grading affects student stress, anxiety, learner identity, motivation, student self-expression, creativity, and peer relationships.

In the light of our findings, we bring together discourses about assessment, grading and student wellbeing to consider the longer-term implications for assessment practices in a post-pandemic world and how educational developers can support colleagues to create more compassionate assessment practices.

Assessment policies and practices are "notoriously immune to radical change" (McArthur, 2021, p.23). Though it is challenging to make radical changes to HE assessment policies and practices, there may be opportunities to make smaller changes of benefit to students. The current landscape of neoliberal HE – with a culture of competitiveness, a growing concern about student wellbeing and no space to take risks and fail – suggests a need to re-think grading and assessment by designing compassionate assessment policies and procedures (Waddington, 2021).

References: McArthur, J. (2021) 'Rethinking student involvement in assessment.' Centre for Global Higher Education working paper series 58. Available at: <https://www.researchcghe.org/perch/resources/working-paper-58fin> (Accessed: 24 June 2022).

Waddington, K. (2021) *Towards the compassionate university: From golden thread to global impact*. London: Routledge.