

Dialogic Assessment and Feedback project

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What was done?

The **Dialogic Assessment and Feedback (DAF)** project took place with 18 students and 3 tutors on the Data Visualisation course over a one semester period and delivered on the final year of the BSc in Computer Science programme. The students chose to work in groups of 3 or 4 on their learning and presented their artefact in class on a fortnightly basis. From the outset both students and tutors were engaged in a partnership approach for the duration of this project. The assessment design was discussed with students when they first met the tutors. Jointly both students and tutors came to a consensus on the assessment design which comprised a series of assessment and feedback sessions in class. It was agreed to record these using a flip camera and shortly after the class sessions the recordings were uploaded to the institutional Managed Learning Environment. In addition to this content, the artefact created to share in the class sessions was uploaded. These resources were intended to extend the class based dialogue, to help students reflect, learn and crucially to support the final exam.

How was it done?

The course Data Mining was a newly formed course running in the final semester of the BSc Computer Science programme. Its primary learning objective is

“be able to explain a variety of methods for representing data values and relationships and appreciate the circumstances under which it is appropriate to apply these methods”

The Definitive Module Document (DMD) specified that the assessment was by final exam only. The team discussed how best to develop an assessment for learning schedule that would engage the students with the subject materials and the literature whilst at the same time provide them with opportunities to develop practical skills to support the academic objectives of the course and the employability agenda.

A number of objectives were identified which formed the basis of the assessment for learning design:

- A wide range of approaches to the delivery of feedback, reflecting wide range of knowledge and skills developed on the course

- Provide opportunities to interact with others to develop refinement and improvement approaches
- Develop in students the ability to critique existing visualisation artefacts
- Develop students understanding of methods and techniques appropriate to the development of visualisation artefacts
- Encourage students to reflect on creative process to improve knowledge, skill and understanding

Analysis of these objectives led to trialling a pedagogical framework the **dialogic shamrock for collaborative learning through technology** (Doolan, 2013) to act as a guide for tutors on the course to use a blend of technology and class based activities to engage learners in a collaborative social learning context. This framework encourages students to engage, to build knowledge in a discursive environment, and debate ideas collaboratively, thus promotes the concept of co-constructing knowledge with the tutor acting as a facilitator and guide. A further objective was the need to support students' ability to review and reflect on the formative assessment presentations and discussion in class sessions within a less pressured environment, through the use of session recording. Practicality and theory pointed to the use of a blended learning approach in meeting this objective. To this end the use of a simple videoing technique which minimized the impact on the discussion was sought (Doolan, et al, 2006) it was decided to use FLIP[®] cameras.

Limited numbers on the module (18 active students) provided the opportunity for the tutor to explore these approaches.

Why was it done?

The **dialogic shamrock for collaborative learning through technology** (Doolan, 2013) has been used extensively in practice and was to be trialled in this project to support new members of staff tasked with curriculum design on a new course. The intention was to provide guidance to staff relating to in-course assessment design using the pedagogical framework with roots grounded in the theory of Social Constructivism. The framework used highlights the importance of a strong commitment to engaging with and investing in learners and formative assessment to benefit learners. It was intended that the framework would be used to support tutors in establishing contact between tutors and learners and between learners, to develop reciprocity and co-operation and sense of belonging amongst learners and between learners and tutors.

We also wanted to move away from student's simply thinking about assessment performance and to provide students with opportunities to self and peer review thus learning concepts together in the safety of an e-blended context. We were also keen to focus on and promote assessment FOR Learning rather than Assessment OF learning where students concentrate on their mark/performance.

What effect did it have?

The interview data and researchers observational notes documented during the in class sessions shows that the assessment design resulted in developing a strong commitment to learning amongst students and fostering an ethos of collaboration between tutors and students and amongst students as they progressively and actively participated in the in class sessions. It became apparent that the students developed in confidence and a questioning mind, they were motivated to ask questions of peers and provided feedback to peers alongside the tutors. It was also noted that student's

motivation increased, the attendance rates were consistently high, and there were continual high levels of student engagement. Through this engagement and participation with peers social relationships developed and through engagement with the learning activities it was evident that learning took place and knowledge and skills were enhanced.

This project has shown that investment in assessment practices which involves the students in a dialogue in the design, development and delivery of assessment and feedback practice encourages positive student engagement and enhances learning. Additionally, the role of the tutor is a key critical enabler of student participation and engagement in assessment FOR learning. This was possible in this project given that there were 18 students.

How are people hearing about it?

This project has been shared institutionally, nationally and internationally with colleagues. Institutionally, the practice is now embedded on the Data Visualisation course and has been extended for use on other courses such as Human Computer Interaction delivered to the MSc students where the majority of students are international. In addition to publications and presentations at national and international conferences this project has been shared online. The Dialogic Assessment Feedback principles of ‘good learning, teaching and assessment” practice’ were established in this project by engagement in dialogue with tutors and learners alike and have been and continue to be widely disseminated using the learners own voice (Doolan, 2010a; Doolan, 2010b; Doolan & Morris, 2010).

Doolan, M. A. (2010a) **‘It’s not just Assessment FOR Learning: Developing an Assessment Centred Model’**. In: *International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation (ICERI 2010)*, 15 - 17 November. Madrid, Spain: ICERI

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What next?

This project formed the basis of further funding which has been obtained from the Higher Education Academy which led to further publications such as Doolan, M. A. (2013) **‘Enhancing the Postgraduate Experience of Assessment and Feedback in a Learning Community’**. In: *International Conference of E-Learning ICEL 2013* 27-28 June. Cape town, South Africa

Additionally, trialling the shamrock pedagogical framework in this project enabled further development of the model which was included in my thesis Doolan (2011) ***Using technology to support collaborative learning through assessment design***. University of Hertfordshire available at: <http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/handle/2299/6055>

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