Assessment and Feedback in Higher Education

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This chapter explores the advantages and pitfalls of involving students in the assessment process. The importance of developing trust through developing students’ competency and integrity is highlighted (Carless 2009) and there are examples of practical activities that aim to develop trust.

In Chapter 6, I discussed academic standards, arguing that standards are constructed within the teachers’ community of practice (Sadler 2014; Butler Shay 2004). Teachers benefit from discussing and sharing their understandings of standards between each other, as well as sharing these understandings with students. Students need a good understanding of academic standards to direct their learning. In this chapter, I describe how students can become fully involved in the assessment process, co-designing assessment tasks and making judgements about the quality of their own and their peers’ work. This involvement, and preparation for assessment design and marking, ensures that students have a good understanding of assessment processes and standards, are able to make judgements about their own and their peers’ work, can direct their own learning and plan strategies to develop their work.

Why Involve Students in Assessment?

When students are involved in the assessment process, they gain an understanding of the standards they are expected to achieve. In influential papers, Sadler (1989, 2009 and 2010) argues that students need to develop their understanding of assessment standards through
involvement in activities that replicate the experiences of markers (see also the discussion in Chapters 2 and 8 on evaluative judgement).

Teachers develop their understanding of academic standards through their assessment experiences and interactions with peers (Bloxham and Price 2015; Sadler 2014; Butler Shay 2004). When teachers set an assessment task, they may not know initially what students are able to produce in response to the task, particularly a new assessment task. It is through seeing many student responses to assignments, seeing the range of work that students can produce, making judgements about that work and discussing these with peers that they develop a sense of standards on the programme (Sadler 2010). In co-constructing academic standards, programme teams articulate what counts as good quality student work (see Chapter 6 for a discussion on calibration). Sadler (2010) argues, that students need to experience a similar process; they need to see a range of work in order to develop an understanding of quality; by showing students a range of work, we expose them to the kind of experiences markers have. Through group discussion on the quality of this work, students are helped to develop an understanding of standards and an interpretation of assessment criteria.

The overt aim is to shift the focus away from telling students about the quality of their work (disclosure) and towards having them see and understand the reasons for quality (visibility), and in the process develop personal capability in making complex judgements [...] educating students in the art of making substantive and comprehensive appraisals in ways similar to those characteristically used by expert assessors. (Sadler 2010, 546–7)

If students have the opportunity to create constructions of academic standards and understand the standard they need to reach, they are less dependent on teachers telling (transmissive) them what to do (Sadler 2010). This frees students from the need to check constantly with teachers or to be dependent on teachers for feedback on their work. Students can avoid ‘learned dependence’ (Yorke 2003, 489) on a teacher and become more autonomous learners. Through these experiences they develop assessment literacy which Price et al. (2012) define as a range of knowledge and skills, namely:
• an appreciation of assessment’s relationship to learning
• a conceptual understanding of assessment
• understanding of the nature, meaning and level of assessment criteria and standards
• skills in self- and peer assessment
• familiarity with technical approaches to assessment (e.g. familiarity with pertinent assessment and feedback skills […])
• possession of the intellectual ability to select and apply appropriate approaches and techniques to assessed tasks.
(quoted from Price et al. 2012, 10)

Teaching idea – Paraphrasing assessment criteria (Carless 2016)

Assessment criteria is written in a professional discourse which is difficult for students to interpret (see Chapter 6). Check student understanding of assessment criteria by asking them to paraphrase the criteria in their own words. This can be done online or at the start of a seminar. Give students an exemplar of an assignment and the assessment criteria for the assignment. Ask students in pairs or small groups to take one criterion and rewrite the criterion in their own words. Share and comment on the rewritten criterion. This helps to demystify criteria and creates shared understandings of criteria.

Collect and compare paraphrasing and discuss online or face-to-face. Does this activity reveal misunderstandings of the criteria? What are they?

(See Carless 2016: https://tinyurl.com/tfr8k8j.)

You could follow up this activity by looking at exemplars and identifying aspects of the criterion in students’ work, e.g. what does good quality analysis look like in students’ work?

Follow this work with a guided marking activity.

(See the explanation of guided marking in this chapter, below.)

Students' assessment literacy can be enhanced by involving them in assessment design and assessment judgements, but there are drawbacks. Students (and teachers) may not see this involvement as relevant to their studies. They may feel that they should be learning more content, more medicine or engineering. However, assessment is part of learning and needs to be fully integrated into the programme structure (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5). Activities to help develop students' assessment
literacy, especially an understanding of academic standards, also need to be part of the programme; without an understanding of academic standards students cannot become self-directed learners (see box on previous page).

Peer assessment is widely advocated in the literature but students’ perceptions of this vary. Students may view assessment design and marking as teachers’ work (Wilson et al. 2015) and, in the education market economy, they may feel short changed. In recent studies, students have expressed resentment about doing the teachers’ job and an increased student workload (Wilson et al. 2015; Van Zundert et al. 2010; Planas Lladó et al. 2014). They may also feel that they are not competent to take on these tasks and, if peer assessment is undertaken, may feel their peers are not competent. Preparing students and developing their competence is key to ensuring they understand and benefit from involvement in assessment.

**Establishing Trust**

Recently, many studies on peer assessment have raised concerns around issues of trust, fairness, friendship marking and peer pressure (Raes et al. 2015; Wilson et al. 2015; Cartney 2014; McConlogue 2012; Liu and Carless 2006). Students are concerned about their peers’ ability to give good quality feedback and the perceived laziness of peer assessors. Factors that militate against effective peer assessment are students’ lack of understanding of standards, the competitive higher education environment (Wilson et al. 2015), and modularisation of degree programmes, which creates difficulties in mapping assessment across a programme and building assessment literacy.

Wilson et al. (2015, 19) have called for a more ‘nuanced’ view of peer assessment, recognising the ‘realities’ of peer assessment in practice. Student resistance to peer assessment is particularly strong when peer assessment involves giving summative grades, and less resistant when students are involved in formative peer review activities. There is wide agreement that students need to be prepared for peer assessment (Topping 2010; Orsmond 2004; Falchikov 2004). Sluijsmans et al. (2002) have argued for an extended preparation period – not just a one-off workshop. Some of the common issues in peer assessment can be found in Table 7.1.
Table 7.1: Peer assessment issues (sources: Liu and Carless 2006; Cartney 2014; McConlogue 2012; Wilson et al. 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer assessment issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peers give widely different grades (summative assessment)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peers give inconsistent feedback – poor quality feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laziness of peer assessors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peers’ lack of understanding of standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competitive HE environment</td>
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<td>Friendship marking</td>
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</table>

It is clear from these studies that good preparation of students is essential; before involving students in assessment, the teacher needs to ensure they have a good understanding of academic standards on the programme and that they have had previous practice of designing tasks, working collaboratively, making judgements about peers’ work, writing and responding to feedback and self-assessing.

Developing Student Competency and Integrity

Competence and integrity are seen as key to successful peer assessment. Carless (2009) argues that students need to acquire competency and integrity in order to perform the role of peer assessor. Competent peer assessors understand the required academic standards and are able to make judgements about the quality of peers’ work, with integrity. They can also give good quality feedback and respond constructively to peers’ feedback comments. For students to be competent, they need to understand academic standards and have enough experience assessing work in the relevant setting so that they can make a judgement about the standard of that work and self- and peer assess. In successful peer assessment, students demonstrate integrity and put effort into giving good quality feedback; when students feel their peers have not put effort into giving feedback, they lose confidence in their peers’ judgements. Lack of integrity leads to ‘anger’ towards students who do not fully participate in peer assessment (Cartney 2014, 559). Competent peer assessors have acquired a good understanding of the purposes and processes of assessment and assessment standards, are able to make judgements about the quality of work and compose and use feedback to move on in their learning.
Drawing on the research literature, I propose four key principles to consider when developing students’ understandings of academic standards.

1. Students need to see a range of their peers’ work. This may be exemplars from a previous year or a similar assessment. Sadler (2010) argues that student experiences need to mirror teacher experiences in order to develop a good understanding of quality; teachers see a wide range of student work and this helps them develop an understanding of quality.

2. Students need to articulate what they value in these exemplars, e.g. through oral or written comments. Articulating what they value is a powerful learning experience. Composing feedback is cognitively demanding and helps students develop assessment judgements as they assess peers’ work (Nicol 2010; Nicol et al. 2014; McConlogue 2015).

3. Students discuss their value judgements with others and engage in dialogic feedback (Carless and Boud 2018) with peers and teachers. Through discussion in a community of practice, students compare their understandings and negotiate socially constructed standards within the group. (See Sadler 2014, Butler Shay 2004 and Chapter 6 for more on the socially constructed nature of academic standards.)

4. Students develop confidence in their peers’ ability to assess and give feedback; peers are perceived as having good levels of assessment literacy (competency) and are trusted to give detailed and helpful feedback (integrity) (Carless 2009).

These principles can be used to design assessment activities to develop students’ understanding of assessment. The flexible framework proposed in this chapter suggests ways of gradually introducing students to peer assessment, building expertise across a programme of study. A key aspect of the framework is ensuring that students are gradually introduced to the notion of academic standards and acquire experience in making assessment judgements. In the framework it is assumed that when students feel that their peers are competent, they are more likely to value peer feedback. If levels of trust in the group are not high, students can still develop their understanding of academic standards without engaging in peer assessment through engaging in stage one preparation activities (see below).
Activities for Developing Competence and Integrity

Stage One: Preparation Activities

Falchikov (2004) points out the importance of preparation in getting students onboard. Preparation activities occur at the beginning of the programme, when students are in most need of checking their understanding of assessment standards and are most likely to accept working with peers as the ‘norm’ for this programme of study (Rudy et al. 2001). The aim is to move students away from relying on authoritative teacher feedback at an early stage, thus helping students to avoid ‘learned dependence’ (Yorke 2003, 489) on teacher feedback.

**Guided Marking**

This is a widely-used strategy, designed to help students explore and gain an understanding of teacher expectations and standards. Students read a range of written work from a previous year or view recorded presentations. The previous year assignments show a range of quality (for example, assignments judged by the teacher to be satisfactory, good and excellent) so that students see a range of possible responses to the assignment brief and can begin to make judgements about the quality of work (principle one above). Guided marking is organised either in a seminar or lecture, or online, before students start their own assignments so that their experience of reading and discussing these assignments helps them to understand teacher expectations. Students articulate their judgements in feedback comments (principle two above). It is crucial that the teacher organises online or face-to-face discussions about the judgements students make, as this gives students the opportunity to explain their judgements, raise issues and question the teacher about his/her judgement and what s/he values in the assignment (principle three above) – see box on following page.

**Marker’s Commentary**

Explaining standards is difficult; showing a range of exemplars and explaining why the exemplars meet the standard helps students better grasp what they need to aim for. In a marker’s commentary, teachers comment on past assignments explaining their assessment judgements.
Teaching idea – How to implement guided marking

Organise guided marking at the start of a module, as it helps students understand the standard of assignment required.

Start by collecting exemplar assignments from previous year students and gain permission to use these exemplars. If the module is new, use similar assignments from a related module. Explain the assignment to students either online or in class. Students then receive assessment guidelines and three exemplars that show a range of work (borderline to excellent); it is important that students see a range as this helps develop their understanding of quality (Sadler 2010).

Give students sufficient time to read, rank, give grades and make comments on the exemplars. This can be done online in a virtual learning environment, e.g. using a Moodle workshop (see below and https://docs.moodle.org/22/en/Workshop_module for a description of how to use Moodle workshop). Either online or in class, lead a discussion on the exemplars, comparing grades and comments. Prompt students to discuss key issues, e.g. presentation of results, criticality and creativity. It helps students to interpret standards and assessment criteria if you can point to examples of these criteria in the exemplars, explaining what you value in student work. Finally, give students practice in writing constructive feedback on the exemplars; they can post and share feedback online and you can also share your feedback comments. Lead a discussion (online or face-to-face) on what feedback students find helpful and why.

This activity helps students, especially first year students, to better understand what good quality work looks like in their discipline. It also helps you to explore and guide their thinking and share your knowledge of academic standards. Be prepared for lively discussion and for challenges to your grading and feedback comments.

of exemplar assignments, discussing what they value in the work and explaining difficult concepts like ‘criticality’ by pointing out concrete examples in the work: ‘this is what I mean by criticality and here’s an example in this assignment’. See the Stem Wishees website for examples of marker’s commentaries (http://www.learningdevelopment.qmul.ac.uk/wishees). In recorded videos, teachers use exemplars to clarify their expectations and explain assessment standards.
A follow-up discussion is organised, e.g. through a seminar or online forum, so that students can ask questions and critique the teacher’s judgements (dialogic feedback, principle three above).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching idea – How to make a marker’s commentary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Use a marker’s commentary to reinforce the guided marking activity or as a replacement. Marker’s commentaries can be done wholly online or blended; students can read exemplars and listen to a recorded commentary online and discuss later in a lecture or seminar. To make a marker’s commentary, first collect examples of a range of student assignments for your module, with permission to use, and anonymise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about the assignment task you set and what you expected students to achieve. It is helpful to think about what you value in students' work; this may be criticality, creativity or a demonstration of professional competencies. Look for examples of these qualities in the range of exemplars. Make a short video or audio recording or write a short commentary on what you value in the exemplars, clarifying your expectations. You may want to listen to examples of teachers doing this on the Stem Wishees website (see <a href="http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk/wishees/collections/quinnipiac/microbiologyundergraduatereport/55529.html">http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk/wishees/collections/quinnipiac/microbiologyundergraduatereport/55529.html</a> for an example). Post the written or recorded (audio or visual) commentaries online. Encourage dialogue; ask students to discuss the exemplars and commentaries. This can be done anonymously using an online forum. Follow up the discussion and post frequently asked questions (FAQs) with responses. Monitor use of the marker's commentary and use student feedback to improve your commentaries and clarify misunderstandings.</td>
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**Peer Review**

In peer review, students are provided with opportunities to articulate their judgements and try out their new understandings of teacher expectations by reading their peers’ written assignments or listening to/watching oral presentations and giving feedback. Principle two states that students articulate their judgements, either orally or in a written form. There is evidence that composing feedback is beneficial, and perhaps more beneficial than receiving it (Nicol et al. 2014; McConlogue 2015; Kim 2009).
As giving feedback to peers is one area of contention (because of power relations and friendship marking (Liu and Carless 2006; Cartney 2014)), in order to maintain good group relationships this feedback is initially written for the teacher, and not shared with peers. In composing feedback, students articulate their understanding of assessment standards, giving the teacher some insight into what students understand and what they struggle to understand. Teachers comment and respond to student feedback either individually or, depending on class size, with generic feedback, explaining what they thought students did well, ways they could develop their feedback and what they should comment on. As students do not receive their peers’ feedback, the conflict in the group that can arise is avoided while students develop expertise in articulating feedback. Students can use insights from peer review discussions to self-assess their work.

Using Preparation Activities

Depending on the students’ prior expertise, preparation activities could be performed several times at the beginning of a programme of study (e.g. throughout the first year of an undergraduate programme, or the first term of a postgraduate programme) so that students gradually build up expertise. There is evidence that, over time, the quality of students’ feedback improves as their understanding of disciplinary constructs develops (Wen and Tsai 2008). As an added bonus, students can use their growing expertise to self-assess their own work before submitting, thus directing their own development.

After each of these activities, the group debriefs, evaluating how well the activity worked and what the group gained from it. Lessons are learned for the next iteration. The framework is flexible and designed to be adapted to any educational context; the teacher and students decide whether they want to progress to the next stage. They may decide to stay with stage one activities as these cover the first three principles for developing understandings of academic standards.

Stage Two: Practising Activities

Once students have sufficient experience of preparation activities, the group takes a decision as to whether to move on to practising activities. Depending on the context, some groups may feel most comfortable and derive the most benefit from stage one activities, and may wish to continue with these while other groups may move on quickly to stage
two and three activities. (See below, How the framework might be used, for more suggestions.)

**Peer Review and Exchange of Comments**

Peer review of summative activities is obviously higher risk than peer review of formative activities and necessitates a level of competence, so that assessment feedback is perceived as reliable (or at least as reliable as teacher feedback). A level of integrity is developed so that competition and friendship marking (Wilson et al. 2015; Carless 2016) do not affect the feedback. Multiple peer assessors can help develop judgement as students see multiple views of their work and this can support students in composing a response (a rebuttal) to peer reviewer comments.

At this stage of the framework, students initially start a peer review of draft assignments or practice oral presentations. Students receive feedback on draft work or on practice presentations and then use this feedback to improve the final assignment before submitting for teacher marking. By this stage, the first three principles have been met, and the exchange of feedback comments has begun the process of developing trustful relationships within the group (principle four).

**Peer Assessment (Summative)**

For summative peer assessment, students need to have confidence in their peers’ competence and integrity. In summative peer assessment, students award grades as well as providing feedback. Grading work, rather than just commenting, is more contentious and causes more student protest. Commonly reported problems are lack of engagement, poor quality feedback (leading to lack of trust in the peer assessor) and friendship marking (McConlogue 2015; Cartney 2014; Wilson et al. 2015). To minimise contention, peer assessment is introduced on small tasks, e.g. a background section of report (McConlogue 2012), which carry a small percentage of the overall final summative grade. After submission of the assignment, students attend a rehearsal marking (Falchikov 2004), where they are provided with a sample range of the assignments to be assessed; rehearsal marking can also be set up online. In the rehearsal marking, students have an opportunity to ask questions about how any difficult concepts or calculations should be marked. Following principle one, they see and grade a range of assignments. They discuss their grading in groups and with the teacher, and practise composing feedback comments. Students are now prepared to peer
assess assignments. Assignments are allocated to students and, within an agreed deadline, they grade and write feedback comments which are automatically returned. Students receive their grades and feedback and then write a rebuttal to the peer reviewers.

As students develop the ability to give good quality feedback, the group decides whether to peer assess larger and more heavily weighted assignments. A requirement for moving on to the next stage is that teachers and students are confident of their own and their peers’ ability to give reliable grades and feedback. To further establish trust, moderation and complaints procedures are set up. Friendship marking and grader reliability can be monitored, especially if an online system is used (e.g. a Moodle workshop, see Wilson et al. 2015 for an explanation). Complaints procedures provide a safety valve for dissatisfied students. Commentary on peer feedback, or a rebuttal, where peers explain whether the feedback was helpful and what they will use from it, mirrors the peer review process. The rebuttal provides a safety valve for students who feel disgruntled with their reviewers’ comments and ensures that students take review seriously and give responsible comments. The rebuttal also helps reviewers reflect on the comments they compose and how they might be improved, thus developing their expertise. After each of these stages, the group debriefs, evaluating how well the activity worked and lessons learned are used to develop the next iteration or progression to the next stage.

*How to Organise and Moderate Peer Assessment*

Good organisation and preparation are essential for successful peer assessment (see Figure 7.1). Follow the guidelines for preparation above; for example, guided marking and rehearsal marking. Once students are ready to peer assess, ensure that their assignments are submitted and anonymised, e.g. use an online tool like a Moodle workshop (see below and [https://docs.moodle.org/22/en/Workshop_module](https://docs.moodle.org/22/en/Workshop_module)). Allocate peer assessors, ensuring each student receives multiple assessors; a Moodle workshop can be set up to automatically allocate multiple assessors. If possible, group assignments according to level and ensure peer assessors receive a range. Provide a feedback worksheet for guidance and/or feedback comments (ensure both have been used and discussed in preparation activities – do not introduce new worksheets at this stage). Ensure that students are aware of the moderation and complaints procedures. You need to be aware of any issues that arise during peer assessment so that you can resolve them quickly. Give peer assessors
a deadline (e.g. two weeks). A Moodle workshop can be configured
to automatically end access by the deadline and distribute grades and
comments. Ensure you check grades and comments before they are
made available to students; some software can help by identifying the
spread of peer assessors’ grades. Resolve any complaints and evaluate
peer assessment using your reflections and student feedback to improve
the next iteration.

**Figure 7.1: Organising peer assessment**

*Using Software to Manage Peer Assessment*

Software can help enormously with the administration of peer
assessment, especially in large classes. For example, Moodle can be
configured to (adapted from Moodle 2019):

- set up practice ‘rehearsal marking’ activities; students mark
  exemplar assignments and compare with teacher’s judgements
- collect submitted assignments
- anonymise and allocate assignments to peer markers
- host ‘structured assessment forms’, feedback worksheets, assessment criteria and ‘rubrics’
- send reminders to peer assessors and close down when the
deadline is reached
- collect and average marks from multiple markers
- permit teacher moderation of grades; teachers can ‘override’
average peer assessor grade, if judged to be necessary
- distribute grades and feedback to students.
Stage Three: Partnership

Once students have completed preparation and practising activities (and how long this takes will vary depending on students' prior knowledge and experience) the group is ready to move on to the next stage, to collaborative assessment. The judgement about where to start and what to move on to is increasingly taken within the group with students and teacher collaborating, building a trustful relationship. For example, in a professional programme, the programme may start with stage one activities in the framework and move quickly through to stage three.

At the partnership stage, students have considerable expertise in making assessment judgements and composing, evaluating and acting on feedback. They also gain control over designing the assessment task, co-constructing assessment criteria, giving feedback and grades (McConnell 2002, 2006). This stage requires a high level of competency and integrity; the group needs to agree academic standards. The teacher's role is to facilitate group discussions, provide guidance on time commitments, mediate, and ensure student-developed assessments meet quality assurance and institutional requirements. To be able to handle this stage, students need to be acculturated into academic standards and assessment processes in the institution, and have developed expertise in making assessment judgements. As above, moderation and student complaint procedures should be clear.

How the Framework Might be Used

In an undergraduate degree, this framework could be used to develop understandings of academic standards across the programme, starting with stage one activities in the first year and progressing, if the group is ready, to stage three by the final year. Taught postgraduate programmes and continuing professional development courses, might begin with guided marking (stage one), but progress quickly through the stages and introduce collaborative assessment early in the programme or in the second semester (see McConnell 2006 for an example of this). As
groups develop differently, interact differently, and as building a trustful relationship is especially essential to stage three of the framework, it is important the group makes a judgement about how fast to progress through the stages.

The institutional structures for quality assurance may present problems; for most programmes, the assessment diet is set and approved at the outset of the course. In order to involve students in decisions about the framework stage(s) most appropriate for their cohort, there would need to be flexibility so that these decisions could be made and reviewed throughout the programme, depending on the cohort’s needs, how they get along together and how quickly their expertise in giving constructive feedback develops.

Activities that develop students’ understanding of academic standards and provide lots of opportunity for dialogue, so they can compare their constructions with peers’ and teachers’ constructions, need to be included in the programme design. Figure 7.2 summarises the stages and relevant activities and corresponding assumed development of competency and integrity.

Figure 7.2: Stage 1–3 activities (preparation to partnership)

The following case study discusses collaborative assessment in an online master’s programme, illustrates student involvement in co-designing tasks, constructing assessment criteria, giving feedback and agreeing grades.
Case Study: Peer and Collaborative Assessment in an Online Master’s Course

Type of programme – MEd in e-Learning
Mode – fully online
Level – postgraduate
Cohort – home and international students
Learning approach – collaborative learning community (community of practice, democratic approach to learning and power relationships)
What’s of interest – use of collaborative assessment; students design the assessment tasks, specify standards collaboratively, devise assessment criteria, work in groups or individually and carry out self-peer-teacher review of assignments.

This fully online master’s programme recruits students interested in e-learning, typically education professionals, e.g. teachers and librarians. The programme is run entirely online, with students working collaboratively in groups, or with a teacher, in small learning sets. The groups communicate through conferencing software with areas for social chat and areas for collaborative and co-operative learning. At the start of the programme there is an initial ‘socialising’ stage, where students exchange information and start to form a community (Brauer et al. 2019; Salmon 2010, 2019). For example, they may write a professional story, reflecting on the key influences on their practice and share appropriate sections with the group. Throughout the programme, the emphasis is on students working together, either collaboratively on student-designed tasks, or co-operatively on individual tasks, sharing discussions and supporting each other. Assessment is seen as an integral part of learning on the programme; assessment is ‘part of the content of the course’ (McConnell 2006, 93). The learning community communicates through online fora, divides into smaller learning sets to work on specific projects and tasks, and comes together in online workshops. The action research approach to learning in the programme means students are involved in a range of small-scale research projects and in discussions and critique of research paradigms and methodologies.

The Role of the Student

Students work as part of a learning community and are required to participate actively in online discussions, to share, discuss and support
each other’s learning. Working together, the groups devise and negotiate assessed tasks. In designing the tasks, students also discuss what academic standard their work needs to reach and agree the design of the task and assessment criteria. This collaborative construction of the tasks and mutually agreed assessment criteria helps students better understand academic standards on the programme. Groups are able to choose the assessment topic (see Chapter 9 for a discussion of assessment choice and inclusive practice) and receive support from their peers and the teacher. In asynchronous online discussions, they explore ideas and share resources. Drafts are self-peer-teacher reviewed; the student first reviews their own work, identifying areas for development and requesting support. Peers and the teacher work to help the student with suggestions for ways of developing and enhancing their work.

*The Role of the Teacher*

The teacher guides students and mediates between student desires and institutional regulations. S/he ensures that the assessment tasks are valid and of the appropriate level and feasible within the module timeframe. The democratic approach to power relationships in the programme means that the teacher’s review and assessment of student work can be challenged by individual students or the group as a whole. The final grade for any assignment is agreed across the whole learning community (which includes the teacher).

Students are, on the whole, very positive about experiencing collaborative assessment. One student commented:

> The assessment process is a lot more integrated into the whole learning process. Instead of being something ‘out there’ and threatening, it can actually be a supportive and motivating process. (McConnell 2006, 140)

Others commented on the difficulty of offering criticism that might offend. One commented:

> I wouldn’t exactly say ‘too kind’ but each peer reviewer has come in with very, very constructive remarks indeed … (McConnell 2006, 132)
While another expected the teacher to intervene:

I think saying the really hard things is the responsibility of the teacher, because despite the fact that I know how keen you (the teachers) were in dismantling those differences, the bottom is not possible, and there were times when I thought ‘no I want teacher intervention here’ … (McConnell 2006, 127)

Further Reading

For a full account of this programme and evaluation data, see the titles below.


For research on online socialisation see:


Follow-Up

Reading

To learn more about the pitfalls of peer assessment, read:

For more on trust and integrity, read:


For an investigation and evaluation of collaborative learning, read:


**Investigating Your Practice**

Introduce guided marking in your programme, especially at the beginning of core modules. Collect students’ perceptions of what they feel they learned from the guided marking activities and monitor performance. Discuss with colleagues. What impact has guided marking had (if any) on students’ performance and understanding of standards. Can you see any evidence of development in their work, e.g. are research results more clearly presented? Are literature reviews more critical?

Work with students and colleagues to redesign assessment on your programme and introduce activities to prepare students for peer assessment. Plan stage one activities (see above) at the beginning of your programme, across several core modules. You could create a through-line of assessment activity across the programme (see Chapter 4), with staged introduction of preparation and practising activities (stages one and two above). Evaluate the effectiveness of these activities with students, e.g. student facilitated focus groups, and staff (through, for example, conversations, see Kvale 1996). Identify lessons learned and refine activities for subsequent years.