THE ASSESSMENT SEE-SAW: BALANCING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY WITH MEANINGFUL LEARNING

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BACKGROUND

Lecturer:	AnnMarie Farrell (annmarie.farrell@dcu.ie)
Discipline:	Education
Subject:	Inclusion of pupils with special educational needs
Level:	Undergraduate – B.Ed. in Primary Teaching
Class Size:	400 students – Final (4th) year
Mode of Delivery:	Face-to-face, plenary sessions and workshops

OVERVIEW

This final year Bachelor of Education module focuses on the effective inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and academic integrity is considered in a range of ways.

Key features include:

- Use of a range of continuous assessment types (formative and summative) with clear feedback on each throughout.
- Clear presentation of assessment expectations at the beginning of the module both face-to-face and in online booklet form as a point of reference.

- Use of UDL principles to provide students with some choice in terms of what they would do and with whom.
- Collaboration contexts designed into the relevant tasks.
- Development a pool of creative and original tasks which require problem-solving and justification.

WHAT WAS THE TEACHING AND LEARNING CHALLENGE?

The main challenge was developing an assessment process that took the large numbers of students into consideration while simultaneously designing tasks that promoted effective and meaningful learning and encouraged academic integrity. In addition, providing choices for a group of this size was challenging in terms of the lecturer's workload in relation both to organisation of tasks and assessment of same.

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

The tasks chosen were very module-specific to try to minimise the possibility of plagiarism from online sources. While this could not be totally eliminated, it was minimised. Further, by developing a pool of tasks within each type over time, it is hoped that 'in-house' plagiarism will be eliminated i.e. students passing tasks onto students in the years below. How the students worked on each task differed also, with some choice built in. For example, when designing the booklet, they had a choice of working in groups of between two and five people, depending on their own preferred style of working, and they were free to choose who they worked with for that task. In contrast, when engaging in the development of an education plan for a student with SEN, groups were assigned by me and the work was carried out in-class across a number of weeks. The case used was an original one developed by me and there was no 'one right answer' in terms of developing the education plan arising. Because the education plan was worked on in-class (workshops), the students could not plagiarise and the development of each plan was organic, depending on the pooling of ideas of that particular group of students. Throughout the module, feedback was provided to students both in relation to the summative assessment tasks as they were completed and formative tasks that were used in the large plenary sessions. The feedback was valued by students and may have increased motivation to produce original work rather than presenting that of others.

Time was an issue somewhat, both for myself and the students. A number of steps were taken to minimise this challenge. Firstly, feedback for the *Peerwise* task was peer-to-peer and built into the task itself which meant I did not have to provide feedback individually (although I did collectively to the whole class) and also, students earned credit by providing feedback to their peers. Secondly, some face-to-face teaching hours were 'handed back' to the students to provide them with an opportunity to meet in groups and/or work independently on the tasks. This simultaneously reduced my teaching time and increased their time to complete tasks within the timetable. The education plan task was done

completely in class time and required no extra time on the part of students unless they chose to work on it between classes. The distribution of tasks throughout the semester by default distributed the feedback and therefore was somewhat manageable. However, it must be acknowledged that there is still a high staff workload inherent in this assessment design because of the large numbers of students.

IDENTIFYING WHAT WORKED

 While all workshop groups were working on the same case study, they were doing so in-class and therefore, were forced into a position whereby they had to engage with the material at a particular time while I was present and engaging with them so the development of the IEP required students to work without reference to the work of other groups. Further, each group only had online access to their own Google Doc so they could not see the work of the other groups unless they made the concerted effort to ask a colleague from one of the other groups to show them their work. This may have occurred but in many ways, it is not relevant. In fact, this could be viewed as a good thing because the skills being developed in these workshops included collaborative practice. The challenge here was to ensure that everyone in the group contributed fairly. I think there were some sub-groups wherein some members did not engage well, but from observation during the workshops this was a small number of students. And, requiring those who did not attend either of the first two workshops to complete a supplementary task prevented absenteeism. In fact, the majority of students were present at all three workshops. The final task had a wide range of choices built in to allow the students some level of control of the task. In addition, they were original tasks which were module specific, and while there was the potential for some plagiarism within this task, it was minimised by its specificity and the provision of choice and therefore ownership by students of the task itself. The constant provision of feedback was valued by students and possibly contributed to a greater motivation to provide their own, original work.

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING THIS PRACTICE

- ✓ Begin planning early.
- ✓ Consider range of ideas for assessment tasks … ask colleagues over coffee, trawl the internet, examine practice in disciplines other than your own.
- ✓ Build up a pool of each type of assessment task which can be rotated over the years.
- ✓ Try to ensure that the tasks are emerging from you and your module.
- ✓ Timetable your time for written feedback … it has to be a 'thing' in your diary.
- ✓ Use technology as much as possible, both for the execution of tasks and for feedback.

REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The balance of the marks awarded for the summative assessment tasks may need to be revisited, particularly in relation to the workshop task. As my students are student teachers, I need to be much more explicit about my own assessment practices and rationale for same so that I can model this approach for them in their own work with primary aged pupils, particularly in relation to UDL principles informing assessment practices.   I intend to widen this assessment design to other undergraduate modules on which I am teaching as student feedback has been very positive and from my perspective, this approach to assessment encouraged meaningful engagement while simultaneously increasing the academic integrity of the process.

Some of the work produced by students was excellent. This year, one of the booklets produced for this assignment will be published by a not-for-profit organisation; that, in itself, lends integrity to the assessment and the possibility of publication will be highlighted from the beginning of the module from now on.

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