The impact of innovative assessment practices on student attainment and experience

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Rationale

- Assessment has a significant impact on “what, how and how much students study” (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004: 3)
- “Expanding repertoire” of “alternative assessment methods” (Struyven et al., 2005:332 & 335)
- New assessment challenges driven by NSS (Brown, 2011)

NSS Questions:
The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance
Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair
Feedback on my work has been prompt
I have received detailed comments on my work
Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand
Teaching staff test what I have understood rather than what I have memorised
Assessment methods employed in my course require an in-depth understanding of the course content

Current Literature - The picture so far

- Students “get very concerned about how fair assessment is, and whether they are dispositionally better suited to some methods than others” (Furnham et al., 2011:262).
- Workload associated with assessment activity impacts on student mood (Coutts et al., 2011).
- Students experience;
  - Dissatisfaction with assessment where it is perceived to impact negatively on ability to self manage workload.
  - Motivational problems where assessment creates competition which deters students from working together effectively
  - Confusion and low morale if assessments are poorly aligned with course content

  (Drew, 2001:319)
- Research into student preferences is sparse (Bartram and Bailey, 2010)

Methodology

The Project

- Aim: to explore the impact of innovative assessment practices on student experience by examining the role of assessment familiarity and preferences on student attainment and experience

- Longitudinal, multi method research project
- Case study - Derby business school

The Paper

- Initial findings from semi structured interviews
- 30 full time undergraduate and postgraduate students
- Mixed international background
- 3 Research questions;
  - What is innovative assessment?
  - How do innovative assessments make students feel?
  - How do student reactions to innovative assessment impact on overall student experience?

What is innovative assessment?

- New, original, novel
- Depends on students assessment background – difficult to establish;
  - Unable/Unwilling to give accurate self reports
  - More concerned with innovative criteria than methods
  - Experiences of assessment vary - international stereo types misleading
- "Students' perceptions of assessment and their accompanying approaches to learning are very personal and individual constructions of the learner" (Struyven et al., 2005:343).

How do innovative assessments make students feel?

- Disliked familiar methods, Liked unfamiliar methods – but no clear relationship
- 'Principles' of assessments that students like;
  - Reflect the workplace

  "I feel like it can prepare you for the work environment cos you don't wanna feel like as we're lab rats and you come out of that lab and you don't know what to do" (Postgraduate student, Cyprus).
  - Fair
  - Offer detailed feedback

  "The assessment that I got good feedback on, I was able to actually sleep the night. Where as the assessment that I did not get good feedback on, I pretty much was drowning myself in sorrow" (Postgraduate student, West Indies).
  - Produce good grades

Innovation and learning – the problem

- Mis orientation of student effort (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004: 15)

"I'd say it definitely did take away from the time that I could have spent engaging with journal articles and reading back on lecture materials. I actually spent a lot of time Googling what is an executive summary …even though I had a clear structure that we'd been given, it's almost like, because its new and you fear it, that's not enough."

(Postgraduate student, UK)

Emotional Response – a problem?

- disappointed, worried, frightened, confused, stressed, nervous, challenged, afraid, terrified, frustrated, crushed, heartbroken, stupid, agitated, baffled, de motivated, overwhelmed, perturbed, pressured, scared, worried, alone.

- *"I did not learn much because [pause] it was stressful and I was kind of giving up."*

(Undergraduate student, Czechoslovakia).

‘Spill over” – Student Experience

- Intention to quit;
- *“I was thinking oh my god what am I doing here or maybe I should start, go, start with undergraduating here again and then reach to this level… So then I can actually progress to this and then now by the time I would apply, I will do masters I will be actually comfortable with writing assignment.”*

(Postgraduate student, Poland)

- The ‘final straw’
- *“First class, first, everything was new, first time in the UK, first time learning environment, new concepts, new style of teaching. That, at that point I truly thought, what am I doing here? I could have gotten a masters back home – why did I choose to come here.”*

(Postgraduate student, Nigeria).

Next Steps?

- Partnership approach between tutors and students to assessment design and choice
- Further research on the impact of emotions to assessment in higher education

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