

Developing productive dispositions towards assessment in first-year business students

Janelle Rose, Michelle Lasen & Kerry Smith

Background/context

Mediating students' learning experiences through curriculum and assessment (Kift, 2015) is particularly important at a regional university with highly diverse student populations. This presentation investigates the efficacy of an approach that aims to simultaneously develop first year students' "productive dispositions" (Kilpatrick, Swafford, & Findell, 2006) towards higher education assessment and written communication skills.

The initiative/practice

A first-year core subject in the Bachelor of Business became fertile ground for collaboration between the disciplinary academic and teaching and learning support academics, on account of its authentic assessment tasks, involving professionally-relevant, written-response genres. With a view to maximising student engagement and achievement, we focussed on a 'live case' marketing blog and report, and developed clear and detailed assessment task descriptions, criteria-standards rubrics, and online support resources drawing on student exemplars.

Methods of evaluative data collection and analysis

A mixed methods (Cresswell, 2014) approach was used including data generated through the learning management system's analytics pertaining to student engagement with the online support resources, student assessment performance, and student evaluation survey responses. Findings based on two internal cohorts (n ≈ 148; 236) and one external cohort (n ≈ 88) indicate that, across all cohorts, access to the support resources was higher for students achieving a Distinction standard or above (i.e., ≥75%) on the assessment tasks in comparison with other students. Of these higher performing students, the external cohort had the highest level of engagement with the assessment materials, in terms of the number of times the resources were accessed and length of viewing time. Students with unsatisfactory results (<50%) on assessment tasks had limited engagement with the support resources. Evaluation survey responses (n = 123; 26% response rate) show that, on average, students "agreed" (4 on a 5 point Likert scale) that the materials helped them to understand and structure their responses to the assessment tasks. In their open-ended responses, students communicated that the suite of resources provided '*...very helpful examples*' and '*...more informative explanation of each section of the assignment*' and '*...helped with structure*', while some thought the video recordings were too long, with one student stating '*... I want the necessary information quickly*'.

Evidence of outcomes and effectiveness

Nearly all students to some extent "behaviourally engaged" with the support resources, however, findings suggest that higher performing students had higher levels of "cognitive engagement", evidenced by higher use and investment of time in the resources (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). While the online provision of detailed task descriptions, rubrics and support resources enabled a "readiness environment" (Mostafa, 2015) for effective and self-paced student participation, it would seem that promoting engagement with online resources among internal students requires academics to provide more explicit cues in, and orientation to, a blended learning environment.

References

- Cresswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oakes, California: Sage Publications inc.
- Fredericks, J. Blumenfeld, P., & Paris, A. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 74*, 59 – 109.
- Kift, S. (2015). A decade of transition pedagogy: A quantum leap in conceptualising the first year experience. *HERDSA Review of Higher Education, 2*, 51-86.
- Kilpatrick, J., Swafford, J., & Findell, B. (Eds.). (2006). *Adding it up: Helping children learn mathematics*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Mostafa, R. (2015). Engaging students via social media: Is it worth the effort? *Journal of Marketing Education, 37*(3), 144-159.