



Exploring the Rules of Engagement via Exemplars: enhancing staff and student dialogue about assessment and learning practice.

Funded by ESCalate Developing Pedagogy and Practice Grant, 2009.

Project lead: Professor K. Sambell, Northumbria University.

An illustrative set of exemplars.

As part of this project the following exemplars were composed by Education tutors to highlight a range of effective strategies and ‘mistakes’ that first year students commonly make when they submit written work in the early stages of their degree.

The exemplars are focused on a short writing task, which requires students to explain ‘deep’ and ‘surface’ approaches to learning.

Students on an introductory learning-to-learn module had been introduced to relevant theoretical models and related research, which they were required to reflect upon in their final assignment. Before the submission, though, the students worked formatively, guided by their tutors, on the exemplars and related activities in seminars.

The following represents an extract from a Log Book which students were invited to maintain as part of their involvement in the module. It includes generating feedback on each exemplar and action-planning in response to seminar discussions on the exemplars.

Thinking about assessment and feedback.

Before the seminar, please read the exemplars on deep and surface approaches to learning, provided below. Jot down some ideas about the feedback you would offer to the student writer of each exemplar.

Exemplar 1

Explain what it means to be an effective learner at university.

In this essay I am going to explain what it means to be an effective learner at university. I will do this according to a structure. First, my introduction will show some background reasons for being effective at university. Then I will write about some ways of being effective. Then I will conclude with some theory on learning.

Immediately when I think of this question 'effective' jumps straight out at me. When starting this course I had to think about my own opinions of learning. I believe effective learning is extremely important and the topics we have covered so far seem to be in agreement with my opinion. I have learned that to be an effective learner at university you need extra reading and writing during and outside the lectures. (lecture 3). Phil Race stipulates that effective learners are motivated (handout in lecture 1). Effective learners are responsible for organising their time and handing work in on time, to do this you have to be motivated. I agree with Phil Race's argument on this (Lecture notes on e-learning portal, 2010).

To be an effective learner you need to think about tools for organising your space and time to be effective. Make sure you organise your desk space before you start to write and you have left plenty of time to write your assignment. Planning helps you get enough theory in and makes sure your essay is correctly done, with the correct references in. Effective learners keep track of their studies with a diary or planner. Also to be effective think about the following;

Do I turn up on time;

Do I manage to fit in manage to fit in most of the things that I need to do;

Do I find I often have to rush things at the last minute;

Do I use my time effectively?

Coming to university is a massive change. Lecturers expect you to take responsibility to set your own priorities for your learning, organise your state of mind and time, to the maximum benefit, to maximise effective learning. I think this is important because I knew people at school who were not very motivated. I used to know people like this at school and they didnt want to pull their weight. Its' annoying when you get people like this in a group if you have to work with

them because they don't put much in and even don't show up to meetings it drags everyone down and lets them down.

Different people learn in different ways. I believe different theorists of learning give knowledge about the ways people learn correctly. I agree with the theory of Stella Cottrell. The types of learner you might be are visual, auditory and kinaesthetic, introverted or extraverted(cited by the Study Skills Handbook by Palgrave Study Skills). Don't worry if you are a particular type you may be a mixture of other types. Do not feel too rigid by this theory of your type because you may have traits of other types. Overall, to be an effective learner in university you need to understand the importance of identifying your type. Cottrell states that what you need to do is experiment with strategies and skills you currently use, the human brain is highly adaptable. Effective learners move easily between different strategies and learning styles depending on the task in hand. A theory I find I agree with.

Reference List

- Stella Cottrell (2008) The Study Skills Hand Book
 - Lecture notes on Blackboard (2010)
-

Exemplar 2

Explain what it means to be an effective learner at university

Ramsden (2003) argues that learning can be thought about as the way we conceptualise the world around us. This view of learning places emphasis on the way that a person sees or thinks about something. To become an effective learner, Ramsden suggests, means that a student relates to, or understands, a concept or sets of ideas in the way that an expert does. From this perspective, students' *intentions* to learn in particular ways underpin the meaning of 'effective' learning.

In some research reported by Richardson (2005) students were questioned about their approach, intention, memory and understanding of a reading task they were asked to undertake. Following analysis the researchers hypothesised that students used "deep" and "surface" processing levels to approach the task. The principal contribution to theories of

learning this research offered was the emphasis on the student intention of learning as a major factor in the approach undertaken, which may in turn determine how effective a student is in assessment. These have become known as 'deep' and 'surface' approaches to learning and are not 'natural' features of the learner, but habits, dispositions and strategies learners adopt. This means, as Biggs (2002) suggests, an individual can take deep or surface approaches as they think the situation demands. So effective learning is not just tied to being 'clever' or naturally smart (Cottrell, 2003). It is, however, often tied to perceptions of assessment, which 'powerfully frames' what students do and what sort of learning they think is valued (Boud & Associates, 2010, p.1).

Wake and Watson (2007) suggest that surface approaches can be viewed as doing the minimum to get by and are widely associated with recall, reproduction and rote learning 'Passive' learning strategies (Cottrell, 2003) are also characteristic, where, for instance, students copy down notes from books, rather than 'digesting' (Race, 2010) the material they have gathered. Often, these views are tied closely to views of assessment as simply testing knowledge and facts, rather than understanding (Brown and Knight, 1994). With passive learning, the student waits to be given important material, sees information as something that should put in front of them, which they try to commit to memory or copy without really relating it to the big overall picture. Although, as pointed out by Biggs (2002), memorization, often assumed as a major signifier, is not necessarily indicative of a surface approach to learning and there are circumstances where memorization for learning is appropriate e.g. formulae or facts. However, in most academic circumstances full understanding is viewed as an ideal. It is in these situations where surface approaches to learning do not make effective learners.

Deep approaches to learning are more effective than surface approaches in most situations at university. Deep approaches to learning are generally seen as a need to be fully conversant with the "big picture" and in order to engage meaningfully with material, a solid foundation is required. The student adopts 'active learning' (Cottrell, 2003), by, for example, setting out to engage with the topic and actively seek out further information, which they link to other ideas and information by discussing with others, reworking their notes, setting themselves questions

etc. The student sees it is their role to 'construct meaning through the learning activities [they] do.' (Wake and Watson, 2007, p.12). The deep approach is associated with positive feelings where the learning experience seen as exciting and a rewarding challenge. Appropriate environments for these deep approaches to learning are seen as those which allow the student to build upon existing knowledge, emphasize depth rather than breadth of knowledge, encourage active student response, allow students to make mistakes and learn from them (Race, 2010). Also the student sees assessment as a process which is done with and by them, rather than simply done to them. (Wake and Watson, 2007, p.13)

References

- Boud, D. & Associates. (2010). *Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education*. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council. Available at http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/assessment-futures/Assessment-2020_propositions_final.pdf [accessed 30/08/10]
- Biggs, J. (2002) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Maidenhead: OUP.
- Brown, S. & Knight, P. (1994) *Assessing learners in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page.
- Cottrell, S. (2003) *The Study Skills Handbook*. (3rd Edition) London: Palgrave.
- Race, P. (2010) *Making Learning Happen*. (2nd Edition). London: Sage.
- Ramsden, P. (2003) *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*. (2nd edition) London: Routledge.
- Richardson, J.T.E. (2005) Students' Approaches to Learning and Teachers' Approaches to Teaching in Higher Education. *Educational Psychology*, 25, (6) . 673 – 680
- Wake, B. & Watson, H. (2007). *The Student Survival Guide to Assessment for Learning*. Available at http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_afl/engagement/voices/publications/studentguides/survival/ [Accessed 30/08/10]
-

Exemplar 3

Explain what it means to be an effective learner at university

What it means to be an effective learner at university is how you approach your learning and what that means to your learning. Learning at university is not just about technical skills and subject knowledge, as Ramsden suggests its about going beyond the possession of these and about developing intellectual abilities. A theory in learning that has emerged in the last 25 years is the theory of approaches to learning. This is about the ways a person goes about learning and the relationship between the person and the material being learned (Ramsden). As Ramsden suggests 'when a student learns, he or she relates to different tasks in different ways.'

The two different ways to relate to learning are known as deep and surface approaches to learning (Ramsden). Here are some of the things about each approach.

A deep approach

Wanting to understand

- Focus on 'what is signified' (e.g the author's argument, or the concepts applicable to solving the problem)
- Relate previous knowledge to new knowledge
- Relate knowledge from different courses
- Relate theoretical ideas to everyday experience

A surface approach

Intention only to complete task requirements

- Focus on 'the signs' (eg the words and sentences of the text or unthinkingly on the formula needed to solve the problem)
- Focus on unrelated parts of the task
- Memorise information for assessments

Some theorists suggest that the same students use different approaches on different occasions. Ramsden suggests that the approaches are related to student satisfaction about their learning. The deep approach is about higher quality outcomes and better grades and is enjoyable and surface approaches are dissatisfying and are more about poorer learning and less enjoyable. Some theorists suggest that students who do a deep approach get better marks. A deep approach individual would find more material more interesting and easier to understand but a

surface approach individual would see studying as an unrewarding activity and spends less time doing private study and is more likely to fail their exams.

Ramsden, P. (2002) *Teaching for Quality Learning in Higher Education*.

Boud, D.J. & Falchikov, N. (2007), 'Developing assessment for informing judgement' in David

Boud and Nancy Falchikov (eds), *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education*, London: Routledge, 181-197.

Boud, D.J. & Falchikov, N. (2006) 'Aligning assessment with long-term learning', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 31, 4, 399-413.

Race, P. (2005) *Making Learning Happen*. London: Sage.

In the boxes below, please write some brief feedback for each student-writer of the exemplars. Organize your feedback under the following subheadings:

1. Technical issues (referencing, spelling etc.).
2. Things that would improve their learning.



Feedback on Exemplar One

Activity



Feedback on Exemplar Two

Activity



Feedback on Exemplar Three

Activity

Please use the following boxes to record any insights and future plans you developed by discussing your work with peers and your lecturer during the seminar.



Feedback



Action