

Proposal for a Paper Presentation

A Faculty-Student Partnership Approach to Assessment in Service-Learning

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Abstract:

1. Introduction

This study involves a faculty-student partnership approach to assessment in service-learning. The aim is to undertake an investigation into the theory, practice and effectiveness of the co-creation of assessment criteria for critical and reflective journal writing. Writing critical and reflective journals can be challenging for students, especially if this type of assessment is new to them. It is asserted in this study that students' active participation in defining the characteristics of high quality reflective journals, helps them to write more critically and avoid writing mere descriptive accounts of their service-learning. Moreover, engaging students in the process of identifying critical elements of journal writing increases their assessment literacy and heightens their sense of ownership of their learning.

2. Theoretical framework/literature review

A reflective journal is a valuable and appropriate tool for assessing students' learning in service-learning. Students demonstrate what and how they have learned through critical reflection on their service to the community combined with the related academic coursework. The type of writing required for this mode of assessment is, in general, untypical for many students in higher education. Indeed, personal accounts can often be regarded as alien to the norms and expectations of academic writing in subjects where students are usually required to be objective and impersonal. Consequently, journal writing can be quite challenging, especially where personal writing is also required to be critical. Not surprisingly, there is evidence to suggest that there is often a lack of rigorous and critical reflection in students' journal writing (O'Connell and Dymont, 2011; Zhu, 2011). This may be of little consequence if one questions whether learning journals ought to be assessed, as do some critics (Crème, 2005). However, if service-learning is an accredited academic course and journal writing is part of its assessment, a lack of rigour and evidence of critical thinking are problematic issues.

On the premise that reflective journals are a valid assessment method for students to obtain course credit for their service-learning, it is imperative that reliable and robust assessment criteria are used to judge students' learning (Deeley, 2015). Key to this, is the alignment of appropriate assessment criteria for reflective journal writing. Such criteria may also act as guidance to students in producing high quality reflective work (Cowan, 2014). In addition, there is evidence to suggest that a faculty-student partnership in the co-design of assessment criteria

can lead to students' deep learning (Deeley and Bovill, 2017). Faculty working in partnership with students is an innovative pedagogical approach that is increasingly influencing learning and teaching practice in higher education institutions in the UK, USA and Australia. Utilising a faculty-student partnership, this study seeks to address and mitigate the challenges of critical reflective journal writing by co-creating appropriate criteria for this type of assessment.

3. Methods/analysis

The research project is being undertaken concurrently with the teaching of a service-learning course in a Scottish university in semester 2, 2018-19. This course has been part of the Honours curriculum of the MA (Honours) Social Sciences in Social and Public Policy since 2006. There are two components of the academic coursework, of which the focus is education for citizenship and active citizenship. Critical auto-ethnographic writing methods (Muncey, 2010; Duncan, 2004; Thomas, 1993) were recently introduced to students as a way of capturing their service experiences. By adopting these methods and combining them with the critical reflective methods already embedded in the course, it is envisioned that high quality levels of reflective writing can be achieved (Hume, 2009).

The aim of the research is to investigate the faculty-staff co-creation of assessment criteria for critical and reflective journal writing. The objectives include scrutiny of the processes involved, such as: the development of a faculty-student partnership; using a critical auto-ethnographic methodological approach; and reaching a consensus on appropriate assessment criteria. As the nature of the project is inductive and exploratory, qualitative research methods were deemed to be the most suitable, using focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews.

Currently there are 13 students enrolled in the course during semester 2 (January to March) and ten students have agreed to take part in a focus group at the end of the course. There will also be alternative opportunities for students to participate in individual interviews, depending on the time they are available and their preference. Focus groups and interviews will take no longer than one hour and they will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in the data collection. Students will be asked to reflect on the course, their participation in the co-creation of assessment criteria and in what ways this has affected their learning.

As the student cohort is small and most of the students will share their views in focus groups, there will be limits to confidentiality within the groups. However, students will be assured of anonymity and all references to them in any publications arising from this project will be scrupulously checked to ensure that individual identities will remain anonymous. As the researcher also teaches the course, there are other ethical considerations. To mitigate these, students were assured that their participation or non-participation will have no effect whatsoever on their grades or degree classification. It was clearly explained that marking of assignments is done anonymously, that marking is second marked, and that all marks are ratified by the exam boards at which the external examiner is present. The external examiner will scrutinise students' coursework and marks. Students were also assured that their participation or non-participation will have no effect whatsoever on the faculty-student relationship. The project has been approved by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University.

Thematic analysis of the data gathered from focus groups and interviews with service-learning students, will make explicit the processes involved in order to address the research aim.

The data will be transcribed verbatim and then scrutinised closely line by line to identify emerging common themes relating to the methods and processes of co-creating assessment criteria for reflective experiential learning, as evidenced in students' service-learning journals. The project findings will also be analysed in the light of, and cross-referenced with, literature in this area of scholarship.

4. Results and Discussion

The project is ongoing and will be completed by the end of April, 2019.

5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

This study will contribute to a fuller understanding of the advantages and potential flaws in the theory and practice of service-learning students' journal writing. It will also present a critical account of the processes of the faculty-student co-creation of assessment criteria. This empirical study will assert that high quality reflective journals are achievable through the co-creation of constructively aligned assessment criteria. In doing this, the project will concur the validity, reliability and rigour of critical and reflective journal writing as a form of assessment in service-learning. It will also contribute evidence based guidance for improving the quality of students' critical and reflective journal writing.

Keywords: Journals, Assessment, Criteria, Partnership, Co-creation

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Biographical sketch of each presenter

Please send the biographical sketch of the presenters together with the proposal using the following format:

Presenter:

- i. Deeley, Susan
- ii. Senior Lecturer and Interim Dean of Learning and Teaching/ Social and Political Sciences/University of Glasgow/Scotland, UK
- iii. Short biography (word count should not exceed 70 words)

Susan J. Deeley is a senior lecturer and Interim Dean of Learning and Teaching in the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow, a Senior Fellow of the HEA, and has two Teaching Excellence Awards. She is author of *Critical Perspectives on Service-Learning in Higher Education*, published by Palgrave Macmillan, and also translated into Spanish. Her research includes assessment and feedback, faculty-student partnership, and technology enhanced active learning.

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