Assessment for the development of professional competence

Justin Rami & Francesca Lorenzi
Dublin City University

34th annual ESAI Conference
Kilkenny, 4th April 2009

The context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full time Students (ES204)</th>
<th>Part time Students (ES222)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Large group (75 students)</td>
<td>- Small group (28 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mostly traditional undergraduate</td>
<td>- Mature students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Full-time</td>
<td>- Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Background theoretical knowledge</td>
<td>- Professional experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No assessment design experience</td>
<td>- Limited background theoretical knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Little design experience (some administered assessment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BSc in Education and Training
Module: Curriculum Assessment
5 ECTS Credits @ 12 week
(ES204 Fulltime Students / ES222 Part time Students)

Portfolio: format and rationale

- Task 1: Reflection diary
  - Assessment: Design & Evaluation
  - Creativity
  - Structured thinking
  - Constructive alignment
  - Assessment principles
  - Real life scenario
  - Authentic assessment

- Task 2: Peer marking and feedback
  - Real life scenario
  - Enhancement of understanding of assessment criteria
  - Feed-forward
  - Authentic assessment

- Task 3: Re-draft Assessment activity & respond to feedback
  - Critically reflect on feedback
  - Improved understanding of assessment principles through reflection & application

Research Questions

- Our portfolio assessment: pros and cons
- Does it suit different student groups?

Key questions

- Does our assessment portfolio foster development of professional competence?
- Does our assessment portfolio enable professional development?

Multiple definitions of Competence?

- Competence is knowledge in action
- Competence is contextualised
- Experience is necessary to build on knowledge to achieve competence
- Reflection is necessary to build on knowledge to achieve competence
- “Being competent” is a value judgment

Source: Cervero et al. 2006

Development of Competence (through portfolio assessment)

- Knowledge (theoretical)
- Experience
- Attitudes
- Practical knowledge (skills)
- Reflection

Competence
Integration of Ingredients

Process-oriented approach
- Environment
- Authentic learning
- Active Student Engagement
- Task-based learning

Why portfolio assessment?
- Scaffolding learning & emphasis on gradual development
- Meaningful ‘whole learning’ task based approach ([Noordman et al 2006])
- Integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes
- Sequenced learning activities
- More opportunities for “work in progress” feedback – adopting a dialogical feedback approach
- Increase relevance of assessment to development of professional competence

Where does learning fit?

Learning is a relational activity (Romand 1997) – it is not just a matter of students “absorbing” a body of knowledge

Students learn what they think they will be assessed on (Biggs, 1999)

Studying as an exercise of selective negligence (Snyder, 1971)

Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment. (Boyd 1999)

Research results: stage 1

Little or no experience of task-based portfolios
Making the unfamiliar familiar = transforming tasks into essays
Under-estimating preparation time
What & How? Need for guidance and reassurance
Initial unease with being allowed to be creative

Portfolio: format and rationale

Task1: Reduction diary
Task1A: Assessment activity & scaffold Design & justification
Task1B: Re-draft Assessment activity & scaffold Design & justification
Task2: Peer marking and feedback

Portfolio Unfamiliar territory for students?

Little or no experience of task-based portfolios
Under-estimating preparation time
What & How? Need for guidance and reassurance
Initial unease with being allowed to be creative
Less familiar territory for lecturers?
- Pre-empting & planning
- The challenge of large groups
- Work-in-progress & constant reminders
- Building confidence & working together with students
- Fostering creativity: research-like supervision?
- Dealing with contingencies
  - (late & partial submissions of interlinked tasks)

Outcomes
Assessment Performance

- 31 out of 75 students successfully completed the portfolio (41.3% completion rate)
- 60% of the students improved the mark on their Activity design (Task 1a & Task 1b)
- Low peer marking reliability (Task 2)
- Narrow high overall marks range
- High peer marking reliability (Task 2)
- Low reflectivity (Task 3)

- 25 out of 28 students successfully completed the portfolio (89.2% completion rate)
- 89% of the students improved the mark on their Activity design (Task 1a & Task 1b)
- Narrow high overall marks range
- High peer marking reliability (Task 2)
- High reflectivity (Task 3)

Student Voices
Positive Experiences

- I learned how to create an assessment.
- I have learned about how much time goes into designing assessment.
- I learned to apply other elements of my learning from other modules into this assignment.
- I learned how to give clearer instructions in assessment design.
- My understanding of assessment and feedback are greatly improved.
- I have learned to link theory to practice.

- Narrow high overall marks range
- High peer marking reliability
- Low reflectivity

Student Voices
Negative Experiences

- Initially very daunting
- Information overload
- Task 1a too early in the module
- Uneasy with marking fellow student
- Too much jargon/language initially difficult for first-timer
- Very time consuming
- Underestimated the preparation time
- I would have preferred feedback from the lecturer on Task 1a
- I would have liked more guidance on marking
- I would have liked more guidance on the reflection component

Evaluation pedagogical effectiveness
- Reflective diaries (included in the portfolio)
- Analysis of performance patterns
- Online questionnaire
- Lecturer observation of learning behaviours

- Does our assessment portfolio foster development of professional competence?
- Does our assessment portfolio enable professional development?
The lecturer facilitated the transition

Teacher Competence

From student to teacher
Empathise with assessors
Appreciation of complexity of teacher’s role in assessment
Appreciation of complexity of assessment design
Fostering openness to new assessment forms

From teacher to student
Empathise with students
Enhanced understanding of feedback as learning tool
Evaluating one’s own practice
Appreciation of complexity of assessment design
Fostering openness to new assessment forms

Where from here?

- Online Survey
- More analysis
- Examining practical implementation
- Promoting a similar model
- Transferability
- Sustainability of the learning (ie: further research?)

Efficiency and effectiveness:
can we strike a balance?

Thank you

Justin Rami justin.rami@dcu.ie
Francesca Lorenzi francesca.lorenzi@dcu.ie