Improving student learning from assessment and feedback: a programme-level view

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University of Warwick SCAP Conference
5 July 2013
The big questions

* Why student *learning*?
* Why assessment and feedback?
* Why programme-level view?
* Introducing TESTA
About TESTA
Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment

- HEA funded research project (2009-12)
- Seven programmes in four partner universities
- Maps programme-wide assessment
- Engages with Quality Assurance processes
- Diagnosis – intervention – cure
TESTA ‘Cathedrals Group’ Universities
**TESTA expansion**

![Graph showing audience overview](image)

6,869 people visited this site

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<th>Metric</th>
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![Word cloud showing cities](image)
“...is a way of thinking about assessment and feedback”

Graham Gibbs
Based on assessment principles

* Captures and distributes sufficient student time and effort - time on task
* Challenging learning with clear goals and standards, encouraging deep learning
* Sufficient, high quality feedback, received on time, with a focus on learning
* Students pay attention to the feedback and it guides future studies – feeding-forward
* Students are able to judge their own performance accurately, self-regulating
TESTA Research Methods
(Drawing on Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet, 2008, 2009)

- Programme Audit
- Assessment Experience Questionnaire
- Focus Groups

Case Study
Programme Team Meeting
Audit in a nutshell

- Number of assessment tasks
- Summative/formative
- Variety
- Proportion of exams
- Oral feedback
- Written feedback
- Speed of return of feedback
- Specificity of criteria, aims and learning outcomes.
Assessment Experience Questionnaire

- Quantity of Effort
- Coverage of content and knowledge
- Clear goals and standards
- Quantity and Quality of Feedback
- Use of feedback
- Appropriate assessment
- Learning from exams
- Deep and surface learning
Focus Groups

- Student voice and narrative
- Explanation
- Corroboration & contradiction
- Compelling evidence with the stats
Case Study...

* tells a good story
* raises a thought-provoking issue
* has elements of conflict
* promotes empathy with the central characters
* lacks an obvious, clear-cut answer
* takes a position, demands a decision &
* is relatively concise (Gross-Davis 1993)
Case Study X: what’s going on?

* Committed and innovative lecturers
* Lots of coursework, of very varied forms
* No exams
* Masses of written feedback on assignments (15,000 words)
* Learning outcomes and criteria clearly specified

….looks like a ‘model’ assessment environment

But students:
* Don’t put in a lot of effort and distribute their effort across few topics
* Don’t think there is a lot of feedback or that it very useful, and don’t make use of it
* Don’t think it is at all clear what the goals and standards
* …are unhappy
Case Study Y: what’s going on?

- 35 summative assessments
- No formative assessment specified in documents
- Learning outcomes and criteria wordy and woolly
- Marking by global, tacit, professional judgements
- Teaching staff mainly part-time and hourly paid

...looks like a problematic assessment environment

But students:
- Put in a lot of effort and distribute their effort across topics
- Have a very clear idea of goals and standards
- Are self-regulating and have a good idea of how to close the gap
## Two paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transmission model</th>
<th>Social constructivist model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert to novice</td>
<td>Participatory, democratic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planned &amp; ‘delivered’</td>
<td>Messy and process-oriented</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback by experts</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback to novices</td>
<td>Self-evaluation</td>
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<td>Privatised</td>
<td>Social process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monologue</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasis on measuring</td>
<td>Emphasis on learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Metaphor - machine</em></td>
<td><em>Metaphor - the journey</em></td>
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</table>
Variations on 23 UG programmes in 8 universities

- Between 12 and 68 summative tasks
- Between 0 and 55 formative tasks
- From 7 to 17 different types of assessment
- Feedback returned within 10 - 35 days
- 936 written words of feedback to 15,412 words
- 37 minutes to 30 hours of oral feedback
- 0% to 79% of assessment by exams
Theme 1: Lack of formative assessment

“Formative assessment is concerned with how judgements about the quality of student responses can be used to shape and improve students’ competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning” (Sadler, 1989, p.120).

TESTA: unmarked, required, eliciting feedback
The potential

- It was really useful. We were assessed on it but we weren’t officially given a grade, but they did give us feedback on how we did.

- It didn’t actually count so that helped quite a lot because it was just a practice and didn’t really matter what we did and we could learn from mistakes so that was quite useful.

- Getting feedback from other students in my class helps. I can relate to what they’re saying and take it on board. I’d just shut down if I was getting constant feedback from my lecturer.

- I find more helpful the feedback you get in informal ways week by week, but there are some people who just hammer on about what will get them a better mark.
If there weren’t loads of other assessments, I’d do it.

If there are no actual consequences of not doing it, most students are going to sit in the bar.

It’s good to know you’re being graded because you take it more seriously.

I would probably work for tasks, but for a lot of people, if it’s not going to count towards your degree, why bother?

The lecturers do formative assessment but we don’t get any feedback on it.
Both/and – either/or questions

- How many summative tasks are necessary to measure student achievement?
- How much formative assessment takes place on programme at your university?
- How do we reduce summative assessment without compromising student effort?
- How seriously do students take formative tasks?
- How do we get students (and staff) to take formative assessment seriously?
We could do with more assessments over the course of the year to make sure that people are actually doing stuff.

We get too much of this end or half way through the term essay type things. Continual assessments would be so much better.

So you could have a great time doing nothing until like a month before Christmas and you’d suddenly panic. I prefer steady deadlines, there’s a gradual move forward, rather than bam!
Theme 3: Feedback - common problems

- It was about nine weeks... I’d forgotten what I’d written.
- I read it and think “Well that’s fine, but I’ve already handed it in now and got the mark. It’s too late”.
- Once the deadline comes up to just look on the Internet and say ‘Right, that’s my mark. I don’t need to know too much about why I got it’.
- You know that twenty other people have got the same sort of comment.
The feedback is generally focused on the module.

It’s difficult because your assignments are so detached from the next one you do for that subject. They don’t relate to each other.

Because it’s at the end of the module, it doesn’t feed into our future work.

You’ll get really detailed, really commenting feedback from one tutor and the next tutor will just say ‘Well done’.
Feedback really matters...

* 1220 AEQ returns, 23 programmes, 8 universities
* Strong statistical relationship between the quantity and quality of feedback and students’ understanding of goals and standards
  * $r=0.696$, $p<0.01$
* Strong statistical relationship between overall satisfaction and clear goals and standards
  * $r=0.662$, $p<0.01$
**Theme 4: Clear goals and standards**

- It is a formal document so the language is quite complex and I’ve had to read it a good few times to kind of understand what they are saying.
- Assessment criteria can make you take a really narrow approach.
- It’s such a guessing game.... You don’t know what they expect from you.
- I don’t have any idea of why it got that mark.
- They read the essay and then they get a general impression, then they pluck a mark from the air.
- It’s a shot in the dark.
Changes to assessment patterns

1. Less summative, more formative
2. Feedback issues: dialogue, peer-to-peer; giving feedback before marks; cycles of feedback
3. Longer modules, linking and sequencing across modules
4. Attention to timing of tasks, bunching and spreading
5. Quicker return times
6. Streamlining variety of assessment
7. Challenging students to do more, at a higher level
8. Structural changes; synoptic assessments
TESTA is about the team

- Programme evidence brings the team together
- Addresses variations of standards
- The module vs greater good of the programme
- Helps to confront protectionism and silos
- Develops collegiality and conversations about pedagogy
TESTA is about coherence
Welcome to TESTA

Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) is a £200,000 National Teaching Fellowship project on programme assessment, funded by the Higher Education Academy, led by the University of Winchester (2009-2012).

TESTA conducts research on eight programmes in four partner universities to map assessment environments, develop interventions and evaluate them. It works with academics, students and managers - and for students, academics and managers - to identify study behaviour, generate assessment patterns to foster deeper learning across whole programmes, and debunk regulatory myths which prevent assessment for learning.

TESTA at Durham

Graham Gibos have a presentation on TESTA to the Science faculty at Durham University on 27 February. Durham is keen to roll out TESTA within the Science faculty and potentially beyond it.


