

Teaching and Learning News

review articles, updates, events and teaching tips from around the faculty

MAY 2011

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The next **Teaching & Learning News** will be distributed during the week of 6 June 2011.

'What doesn't kill you...'

Making sense of assessed groupwork

Jon Shute, Lecturer in Criminology, reflects on the experience of trialling assessed group essays in a compulsory year 1 subject. Evaluation results showed improvements in grades, attendance and satisfaction with feedback, but a persistent student preference for individual assessment methods. In the context of increased attention to the quality of 'the student experience', can one easily proceed with an effective but unloved approach?

The partial Nietzschean misquotation of the title seems an unpromising place to begin an article on the merits of groupwork, but its fuller form ('what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger'), captures a sense of achievement-through-struggle that neatly sums up a semester's experience of implementing and evaluating assessed group essays (AGEs) in a Law School module. This article gives a brief description of that experience.

Context: Why group work? I've directed a level 1 module on Criminological Psychology (around 150 students) since 2005, and have found myself gravitating towards collaborative, 'enquiry-based' approaches to teaching and assessment, for example, devoting seminars to informal group presentations and feedback

(see [March/April TaLN](#)). After writing a literature review for the Law School and becoming convinced of the pedagogy and effectiveness of such approaches (see the [Literature review](#)) I decided to introduce AGEs in order to promote and reward 'deep' semester-long engagement, maximise formative feedback, and better develop transferable skills.

What it involved: I divided each seminar group into smaller 'project groups' of 4 students, and in seminar 1, introduced the idea of writing a group essay (50% of the final mark) based on a past paper exam question. For the rest of the semester, project groups met between seminars and



Jon Shute

reported back on progress in seminars, where the seminar taker gave feedback on progress and advice on achieving the next prescribed milestone (allocating tasks, deciding a structure, submitting a draft, etc). A group presentation was given in the final seminar and the essay submitted before a final exam on the whole course. Extensive documentation supported the process and intensive early-semester communication between Course Director, seminar takers and students 'policed' group engagement. Every effort was made to make groups work, but after a cut-off period (end of week 6), students not engaging without a reasonable excuse were required to submit an individual essay that incurred an automatic 10-mark penalty. Students whose lack of engagement reflected personal problems were supported to submit an individual essay without penalty. Students submitted a joint 'statement of contribution' with their essay that permitted the reallocation of up to 5 % of the overall mark based on an agreed unequal contribution.

The fruits:

Where possible, routine data was compared with that for the preceding year when the course was assessed by exam only.

- **Achievement:** Students scored significantly higher on coursework than exams. Compared to the previous (exam-only) year, there was a higher proportion of overall firsts and 2:1s (56 vs. 38%), and a higher mean mark (59.7 vs. 56.9).
- **'Official' student satisfaction:** Compared to the previous year, the standard University Course Evaluation Questionnaire showed no significant differences on any dimension asides from the item 'The feedback I received on my work was helpful', where the proportion responding 'agree' or disagree' increased from 48.6 to 75.3%.
- **Engagement:** 94% students completed 48 group essays. 7 students submitted an individual essay with a penalty (only 1 failed the course), 2 without. Although yet to be confirmed, early indications are that seminar attendance was improved compared to the preceding year.

Reflections:

I directed the course during the AGE trial but didn't deliver seminars. Had I relied solely then on the above evaluation of routine administrative data, I would have concluded that the costs...

- pre-delivery: designing a workable and fair assessment system
- early-semester: 'policing' groupwork
- late-semester: 'finickiness' of marking, application of penalties and adjustments

...were more than offset by the rewards of greater student achievement, feedback satisfaction, and engagement. Both discussion with seminar takers and bespoke survey evaluation of 125 students (83% response rate), suggested a more mixed student experience, however. Many very positive attitudes were shown, however, compared to individual essays, only 21.6% preferred groupwork, 59.4% felt it involved more work, and 49.4% disagreed that more was learned. 44.3% enjoyed groupwork, 47.7% did not.

Overall then, assessed group work is an initially resource-intensive but effective and workable approach that translates well into official measures of 'success'. The fact that bespoke evaluation uncovered a more mixed picture points firstly, to the need for such evaluation, and second, to the need to build-in student consultation when planning assessments. With this input, I'm confident I can design a more flexible and varied set of assessments that make learning fun as well as academically profitable.

Assessed Group work: Key Questions

If you're interested in running a group work assessment you may find the following FAQs useful.

Does group work drag down the marks of good students and raise up others marks unfairly?

In this example it would appear that generally this doesn't happen. 2/151 students were 'dragged down' by a group essay mark much worse (by 2 classifications) than their exam performance, while 23 poor exam performers were 'raised up' by a much better essay mark. Correspondingly, the majority (125/151; 83.4%) scored quite similarly in both forms of assessment, with a generally higher mean mark for the essay (62.4) than the exam (56.9).

So is free-riding possible?

Not if the process is properly managed. This involves first, repeated efforts (and clear supporting materials) early on in the course to get over key messages about rewards and penalties; and second, active management of groups by the seminar taker, whose role really becomes one of facilitator and monitor of progress.

How do you account for uneven contributions?

Jon allowed for the reallocation of up to 5% of the overall mark based on an agreed statement of unequal contribution by the students. This happened in less than 9% of cases (4/48 projects). Students also completed individual learning diaries which could have been looked at if there had been a dispute.

Why did students find it less enjoyable than individual work?

Asides from 'fear of the unknown', this was possibly because the assessment was completed by students from around eight degree programs each with a different timetable. Logistically it was difficult for students to meet up at times convenient to them all. It would therefore be easier to run this type of assessment with a homogenous class from a small number degree programmes. ●

NEWS and UPDATES

Blackboard 9 (Bbg) Transition Update

The Faculty transition from Blackboard Vista to Bbg is now well underway. All schools have received presentations and hopefully you'll have seen the Bbg roadshow in various places throughout our Faculty buildings. Workshops continue to run during May and June for the last of the schools to receive our dedicated support and there are still some school based drop-ins scheduled this month.



Blackboard

Please see our Bbg web pages www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/bbg if you need a reminder of what support is available or for more details about the transition process. And don't forget that our regular weekly drop-ins Tuesdays and Thursdays 12-1pm in Ellen Wilkinson C1.44 continue to run. Come along if you have any specific queries on Bbg or other eLearning topics. ●

EVENTS and TRAINING

‘Best on Blackboard’ competition 2011

Last year the Faculty eLearning team ran a ‘Best on Blackboard’ competition in which students from Humanities were invited to nominate the resource that they had found most useful in their current courses.

We are running ‘Best on Blackboard’ again this year and have asked students to nominate resources which have had a positive impact on their teaching and learning. We’ll be reviewing the submissions during May and will publicise shortlisted and commended individuals before the end of Semester.

See www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/resources/funding/best_on_bb for details of ‘Best on Blackboard’ 2010.

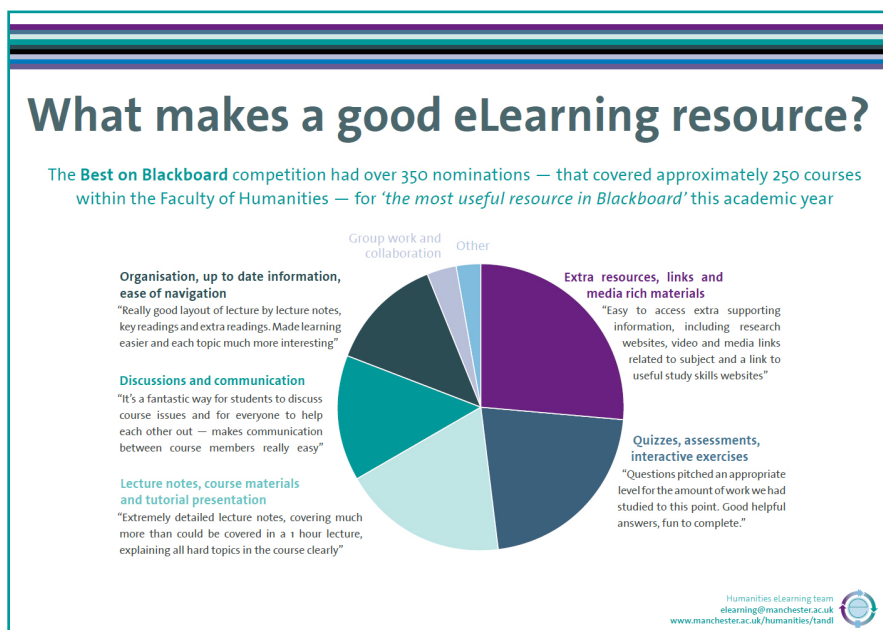


Image from ‘Best on Blackboard’ 2010

Date for your Diary:

Faculty Teaching and Learning Showcase 5th July

Following the successful Teaching and Learning Showcase in January we are running a similar event on July 5th 1pm-5pm in Samuel Alexander Foyer. Put this in your diary. We’ll be publicising the full programme and how to sign up by June.

Confirmed speakers to date:

- **Minjie Xing** (School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures) English-Chinese language learning partnerships
- **Paul Middleditch** (School of Social Sciences) Using Personal Response Systems with large cohorts
- **Joanne Tippitt** (School of Environment Development) Ketso
- **Liam Harte** (School of Arts, Histories and Cultures) Testing 1,2,3: Using formative online multiple-choice tests in the Humanities to enhance student learning, engagement and feedback.

There will also be stalls and support from the eLearning team, PASS and Peer Mentoring, Teaching and Learning Office and the Library. See information about the January event at www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/news/showcase.html

Three lecturers describe different examples of collaboration in Teaching & Learning

An Appreciative Inquiry Approach to Community Engagement, Intercultural Dialogue and Global Citizenship

How e-learning Supported Collaborative Interdisciplinary Working - Kate Sapin

A distance-learning course development project funded by the University's Centre for Excellence in Enquiry Based Learning (CEEBL) brought together academics from different Schools in the Faculty of Humanities to collaborate on the design, delivery, evaluation and dissemination of a course on Community Engagement, Intercultural Dialogue and Global Citizenship.

The content of a Blackboard course was developed through discussions between course directors, Ann Shacklady-Smith from the Manchester Business School (MBS) and Kate Sapin from the School of Education. We also arranged guest lectures, included filmed community events and seminars that attracted participants from different universities and community organisations; commissioned short films to focus on particular community projects; and invited colleagues to submit learning materials providing a range of perspectives on the topics.

The structure of the course emerged via the MBS input of materials on Appreciative Inquiry'.

Students involved in community projects first identified the strengths of their communities and organisations, then imagined what community engagement, intercultural dialogue and/or global citizenship might be in that setting; designed plans to realise these dreams and worked together on evaluation and planning the next steps. The range of projects has included:

- Engaging a working class community in script-writing for a film about climate change
- Supporting intercultural dialogue through the development of teaching materials about Pagan marriages
- Maximising young people's learning during international exchanges between Mozambique and Bradford
- Involving all members of a school community in and International Women's Day debate
- Promoting cross-generational participation in a community garden

'Cooperrider, DL and Whitney, D (2005), *Appreciative Inquiry A Positive Revolution in Change*, San Francisco, CA, Berrett Koehler Pub Inc.



A resource from the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce suggested by a student on the discussion board.

<http://youtu.be/zDZFcDGpL4U>

TEACHING IDEAS

In addition to the course itself and the related learning of students and staff, outcomes from the collaboration have included the Course Directors working together on evaluation of the content and process of the course and dissemination of findings including presentations, chapter abstract for a colleagues book proposal and a prize-winning poster for, *The Distance Education Hub (DE Hub) and the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia (ODLAA) conference*, “Global Challenges and Perspective of Blended and Distance Education”.

Further collaboration?

Interested academics are invited to join the discussion of students’ community engagement in real life projects or to contribute to the course content. Please contact kate.sapin@manchester.ac.uk or 0161 275 3523

Students from across the University are welcome to register for next year’s optional second semester unit, EDUC20342 Community Engagement, Intercultural Dialogue and Global Citizenship. Students should have concurrent work in a relevant community-based project or be prepared to develop such links, e.g. through the Manchester Leadership Programme or other voluntary engagement.

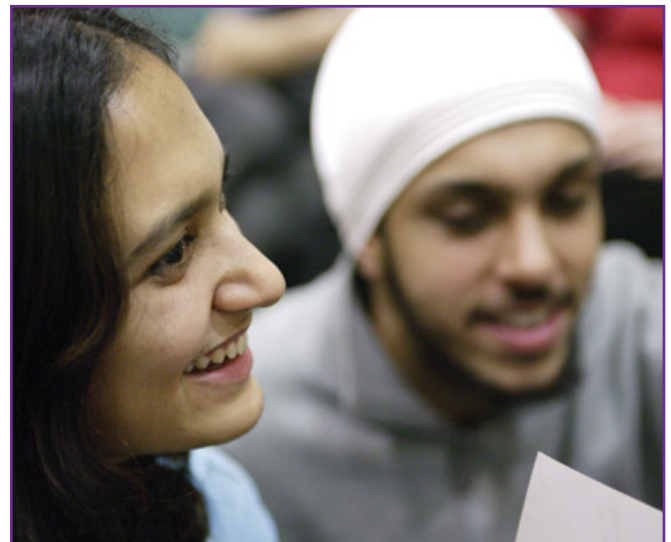
Simulation exercises in class and on-line

Nuno Ferreira (School of Law) and Anna Verges (Humanities E-learning Team)

Institutional and decision-making simulation exercises are very common initiatives in the world of legal and political science studies: a group of students and/or young people come together and participate for a certain period of time in activities that are as similar as possible to how certain institutions work and take decisions.

As we both have practical and academic experience in the field of EU institutions, we wanted to offer an EU institutions simulation exercise to EU Law

students. We created a scenario for the students, which included a legislative proposal and roles for all 371 students enrolled, including all official EU institutions, lobby organisations, and the media. The simulation exercise was carried out over a period of two weeks, including three lectures. Students were offered instructions detailing the scenario, the tasks of each role, and deadlines. Much detail was left out of the instructions, as to create the need for students to explore themselves the workings of the institutions in question (in particular their role), and their place in the decision-making processes of the EU.



Students made use of several Blackboard tools, namely discussions boards and chat rooms to carry out negotiations within their own institutions, and a wiki to share their official positions. Lectures were used to carry out the relevant voting procedures. The proposal was eventually rejected, which did not affect the usefulness of the exercise in anyway. Students’ feed-back on the exercise was very positive: 78% understood better how EU institutions work; 67% understood better how the EU law-making process takes place, and 80% found Blackboard tools useful. Interestingly, 36% learned more with fellow students and 30% found it more difficult – still a long way to make group learning thoroughly enjoyable and productive.

We have certainly learned several lessons from this experience: spread out the exercise throughout the semester to allow students to ‘digest the information’ and get involved with the intricacies of the scenario; hold debates on proposal in lecture, and not only on-line through discussion boards/posting of position papers; plan key moments of the exercise as not to coincide with other important deadlines (coursework submission, etc); make the exercise count towards final mark, as to offer an extra motivation to participate actively.

We’ll definitely be repeating and improving this exercise in future years! If you would like to listen to a more detailed presentation on this simulation exercise, please visit the [Blended Learning Examples site](#): You are also welcome to contact [Nuno Ferreira](#) or [Anna Verges](#).

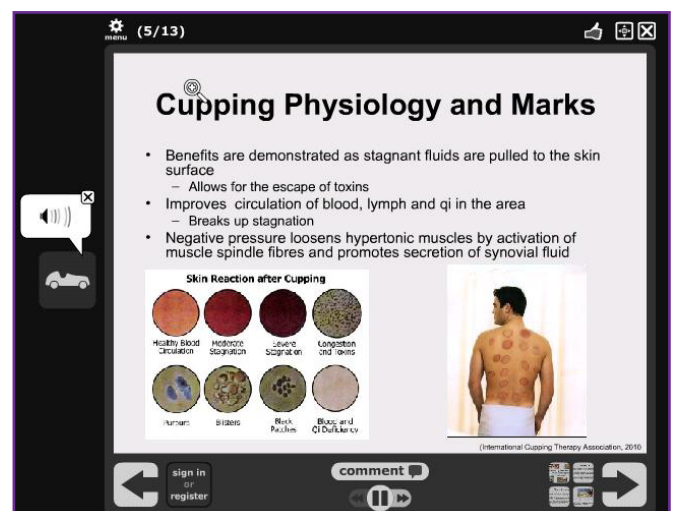
Collaborative Development of Intercultural Skills and Global Citizenship

Richard Fay, Diane Slaouti and Susan Brown,
Language Teacher Education in the School of Education

For the last fifteen years or so, we’ve been designing courses exploring new technologies and intercultural communication, and the interface between the two. For example, *Computer-Mediated Intercultural Communication* (CMIC)—developed with partners in Bulgaria, Germany, Indonesia, Slovenia, and Uruguay—involves Manchester students using various online communication tools (e.g. email, wikis, facebook, skype) for a collaborative English-medium CMIC project with e-partners in the overseas institutions. Students then reflect on that experience and analyse the communication data produced during it. The objective is to develop their CMIC skills. Such skills are becoming essential in the globalised, often technology-driven and increasingly culturally-complex worlds in which most of us now live, study, work, and play. This

CMIC course is collaborative with regard to both the curriculum development and the student experience. It is also technologically innovative and is now one of the Blackboard 9 pilots.

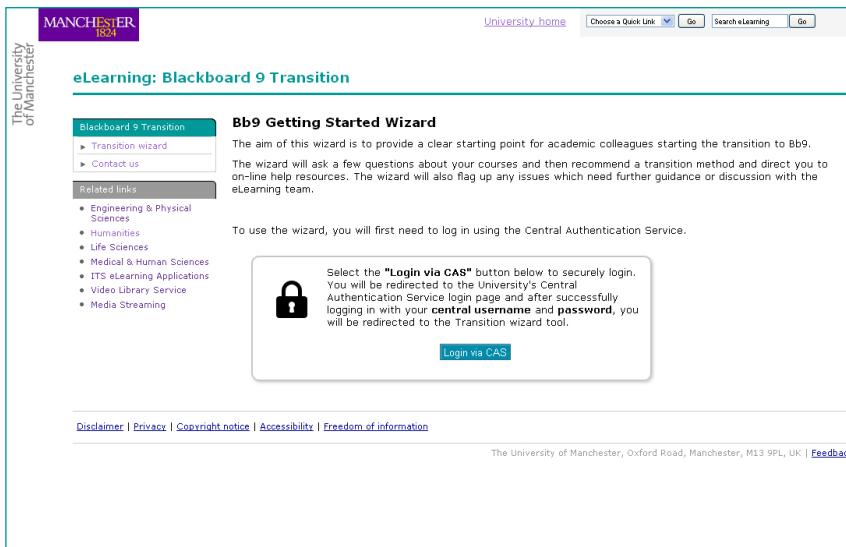
Becoming Global—developed through funding from the Centre for Excellence in Enquiry Based Learning as part the university’s Global Citizenship provision —involves students (from different faculties) using wikis and eportfolios to collaboratively engage with some of the key issues of our time (e.g. sustainability, human rights, global warming) and to recognise the interconnected complexity inherent in them. The course helps students to develop a new habit of mind when thinking about such issues and it focuses mainly on (often online) texts on such key issues and students’ critical engagement with the authors’ positioning in them. This new way of thinking forms part of a global citizenship mindset. The course is assessed through individual online presentations. However, when creating these presentations, each student acts as critical friend for the project work of one of their peers. *Becoming Global* is also one of the BB9 pilots.



An example of a student online submission from the *Becoming Global* course.

Blackboard 9 (Bb9) Transition

If you haven't done so already take five minutes to work through the Blackboard 9 Getting Started Wizard at <http://bb9-transition.manchester.ac.uk>. This should be your starting point for making the move to Bb9.



Screenshot: Blackboard 9 Getting Started Wizard

By answering a few questions about your current use of Blackboard you'll get information on what you need to do next, how to activate your course and links to book on training courses run specifically for your School. The wizard will also notify the eLearning team if your course requires additional support.

Blackboard 9 - re-using content

Content that is to be re-used in Blackboard 9 for Semester 1 and All Year courses needs to be moved over to activated Bb9 courses by the date specified for your school.

Details of these can be found at www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/bb9

Course Activation

You can now start activating courses in Blackboard 9. As not all of next year's courses are currently available, the eLearning team are recommending you activate this year's courses (2010-11). No students will see the Bb9 courses and they will continue to see their current Blackboard spaces. Details of how to activate your courses will be emailed to you once you have been through the Getting Started Wizard (see above).

General details can be found on the IT Services Knowledge Base:

<https://servicedesk.manchester.ac.uk/portal/ss/>

Online Exams

For more information on online Exams, please contact your eLearning team.

If you have an online exam scheduled for the forthcoming session:

1-2 weeks before the start of Exams:

- Check the settings for your online exams. If in doubt, liaise with your eLearning advisor
- Check that Guest accounts have been created by the eLearning team (in case some students are unable to log in on the day)
- If appropriate, create additional instances of the exam (selectively released to students allowed extra time (check with your eLearning advisor)

On the day of any individual Exam:

- Ensure that the exam is released (i.e. visible to students) before the start of the exam and hidden afterwards

For further ideas on eLearning activities to complete in May and June take a look at the online calendar at www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/blackboard/calendar.html

INFORMATION - T&L OFFICE

NEW - Guidance on Informal Procedures (Appeals & Complaints)

Faculty Guidance, has been developed, for Schools on informal procedures for appeals and student complaints.

See: www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/policyandprocedure/guidelinesandpolicydocuments/index.html

Get in touch!

We particularly welcome details of events or activities taking place in Schools that relate to teaching and learning, and also welcome your feedback on [Teaching and Learning News](#) and any suggestions for improvement.

Just contact lisa.mcaleese-2@manchester.ac.uk