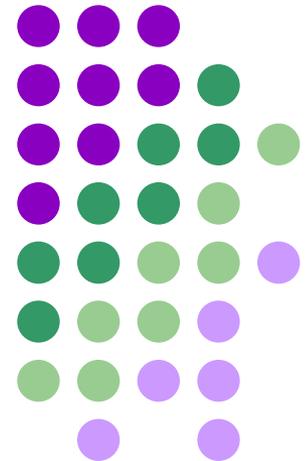


Learning about Masters Level Assessment: the Assimilate NTFS project

<http://assimilate.teams.leedsmet.ac.uk/>

Sally Brown, Janice Priestley, Phil
Race, Ruth Pickford and Tim Deignan

PASS conference
24th - 55th July 2012
Bradford



Assimilate is a 3-year NTFS funded project



- **The Assimilate team have been exploring innovative assessment at Masters level using research funding from the National Teaching Fellowship scheme.**
- **Recognising that limited prior research had been undertaken in this area, the project was designed to review the range of assessment methods used to assess at this level, particularly exploring authentic assessment.**
- **Interviews were undertaken in the UK and internationally by students and team members to elicit information about diverse approaches and to produce case studies showcasing innovations.**

The project was designed to:



- **Survey the range of assessment methods and approaches used to assess at Masters level in diverse institutions, particularly in professional subject areas and in a variety of disciplines;**
- **Investigate the ways in which Masters level students receive formative feedback;**
- **Provide a compendium of diverse approaches to assessing at this level;**
- **Develop recommendations for good practice regarding assessment and formative feedback for students working towards Masters level awards.**



Changes en route

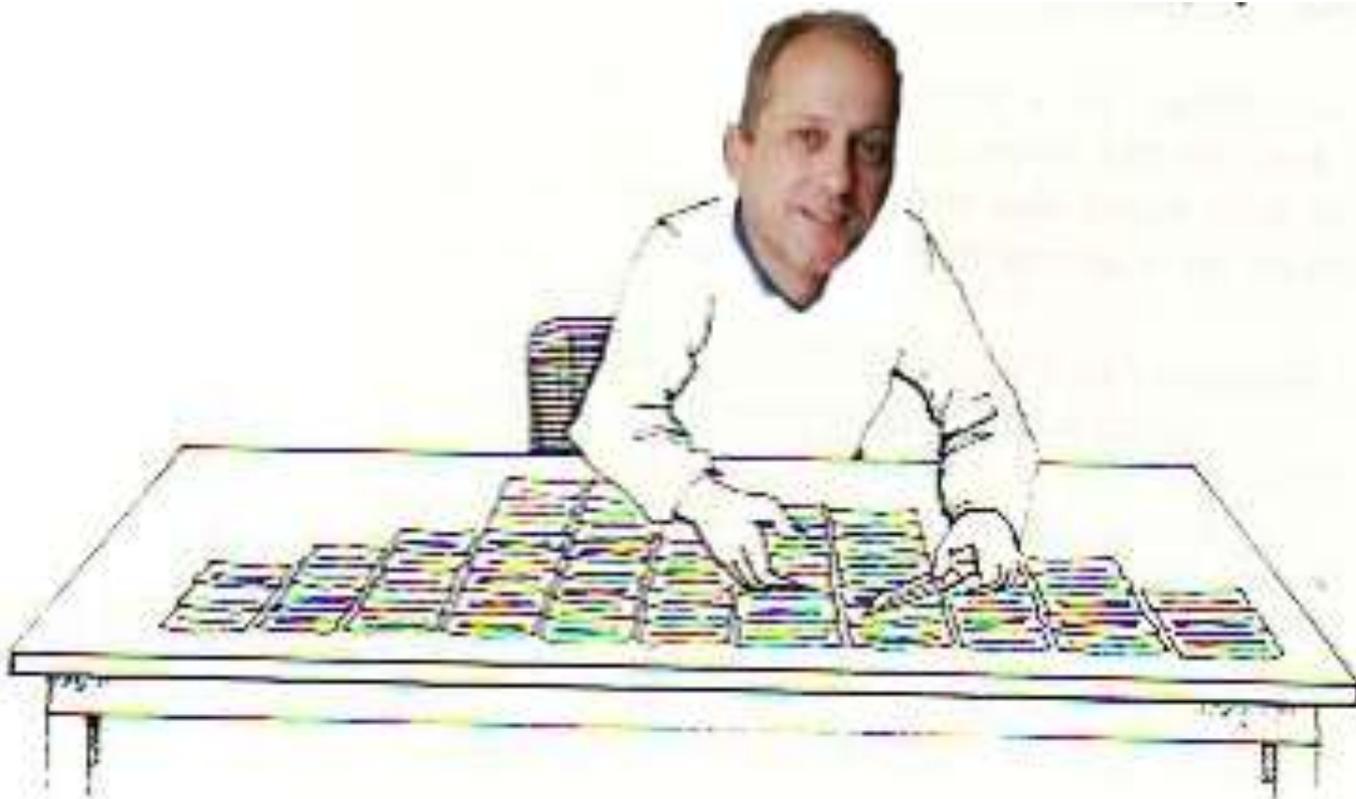
- **We originally planned to use 2nd year Journalism students as interviewers for our research, but this proved impractical;**
- **We then moved to using our (changing) project team members including me when I (semi) retired;**
- **Using data from 45 interviews and from other people who have been working with the project we have produced more than 34 case studies illustrating diverse M-level assessment, including negotiated course work;**
- **We changed our data analysis approach.**

Analysing our data



- **Tim Deignan has been using Activity Theory and Q Methodology to help us make sense of the case study data and to conduct a follow-up study.**
- **His initial research study used Activity Theory to investigate practitioners' experiences of introducing innovative assessment methods at Masters level.**
- **He then designed a Q-study using 48 statements which were rank-ordered by 39 participants .**
- **Using statistical analysis of these data he has interpreted five distinct factors, or viewpoints, relating to Masters level assessment.**

User-friendly: a Q-sort underway



Acknowledgement: My thanks to Dr. Louise Bryant of University of Leeds for sharing this graphic.



Stages in a Q-study

- **Identifying and sampling the concourse**
- **Developing a set of statements that is representative of the concourse**
- **Selecting participants for a diversity of views on the issues**
- **Q-sorting and post-sort interviews**
- **Pattern analysis - data reduction and interpretation**



Viewpoints 1, 2 and 3

- **1: The innovative assessment and accreditation of learning for complex real life / workplace applications requires assessment training for both staff and students.**
- **2: Standards and consistency can not be guaranteed by any means, but flexible assessment criteria and innovative assessment methods have their uses.**
- **3: Introducing innovative assessment methods can be powerful but requires new perspectives on learning with institutional support and encouragement for successful wholesale change.**

Viewpoints 4 and 5



- **4: Clear guidance to students in the form of high quality assessment criteria and timely tutor assessment feedback can help students to develop the skills that they and also employers want.**
- **5: Improving assessment methods does not necessarily require a paradigm shift in thinking, but stakeholder consultation is important as benefits are not guaranteed and one size does not fit all.**

Dissemination events



- **Our own Assimilate conference July 2011 and our planned final international event September 6th 2012**
- **Presentations/workshops at Newman University College, Aberdeen university, Central Queensland University, SRHE, Institute of Education, Queens University Belfast, York St John and Cranfield University;**
- **Conference presentations at Cumbria University T&L event, NTFS symposium, York, SEDA 2012 Chester, HEA York**
- **Posters accepted at ISL Lund and (probably) SRHE Newport.**

Publications plan



- 1. Project reports for HEA**
- 2. Articles in refereed journals:**
 - a. ‘What are the differences between Masters and UG level assessment?’ IETI, accepted**
 - b. ‘Innovations in Masters level teaching’ (final draft)**
 - c. ‘Making sense of educators experiences and views of assessment innovation at M level’ (drafted & being redrafted)**
 - d. Chapter in book on M level teaching & assessment**
 - e. Further technical articles for Q journals**
- 3. Compendium of resources and good practice advice for website and for delivery at our conference.**

What we have achieved and not achieved



- **We had little success using students as researchers;**
- **We have survived major changes in our project team;**
- **We have successfully populated a useful (and well-used) website with case studies and overviews;**
- **We have explored M-level assessment widely in the UK as well as in Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Singapore, new Zealand and Australia.**

Further achievements



- **We have met all project milestones to date and to budget;**
- **We are adding significantly to understanding of M-level assessment, particularly through our analysis of data to identify viewpoints;**
- **We have produced and are still producing a range of useful and relevant project outputs;**
- **We have successfully networked in the UK and internationally;**
- **Team members have themselves benefited significantly from the project in terms of CPD;**



And where next?

- **We will continue to publish our outcomes and disseminate our findings;**
- **We will share our outputs through our networks;**
- **Our website will continue to show case the project for the foreseeable future;**
- **We will seek further opportunities for research, potentially exploring the differences between M level and PhD assessment.**

Selected references and further reading



- Barry, J. & Proops, J. (1999). Seeking sustainability discourses with Q methodology. *Ecological Economics*, 28(3),337-345
- Casey, J. (2002) On-line assessment in a masters-level policy subject: participation in an on-line forum as part of assessment. Centre for the study of higher education, Charles Sturt University, Australia.
- Dunn, S. and Singh, K. A. (2009) Analysis of M-level modules in interdisciplinary nanotechnology education. Nanotechnology Centre, Department of Materials, School of Applied Sciences, Cranfield University.
- Engeström, Y. (2010). Studies of expansive learning: Foundations, findings and future challenges. *Educational Research Review*, (5):1-24
- Fry, H., Pearce, R. and Bright, H. (2007) Re-working resource-based learning - a case study from a masters programme. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 44(1), pp.79-91.
- Geographical Association. (no date) *GTIP Think Piece - Writing at Masters Level*. Available online: <http://www.geography.org.uk/gtip/thinkpieces/writingatmasterslevel/>
- Haworth, A., Perks, P. and Tikly, C. (no date) Developments with Mathematics M-Level PGCE Provision and Assessment. University of Manchester, University of Birmingham, University of Sussex.

References (contd.)



Institute of Education (2006) Masters level criteria for Geography PGCE
http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_PRGTIPBrooksMLevelCriteria.pdf Accessed March 2012

Lord, D. (2008) Learning to Teach a Specialist Subject: Using New Technologies and Achieving Masters Level Criteria. In: *MOTIVATE conference 2008, 11 - 12th November 2008, Dunaujvaros, Budapest.* (Unpublished) This version is available at
<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/10892/> Accessed march 2012

NZQA (2007) <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/Studying-in-NZ/New-Zealand-Qualification-Framework/theregister-booklet.pdf> (accessed March 2012)

M level PGCE. (2007) ESCalate ITEM level PGCE seminar at the University of Gloucestershire on January 9th 2007.

QAA (2010) Masters Degree Characteristics
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/masters/MastersDegreeCharacteristics.pdf>

Seymour, D. (2005) Learning Outcomes and Assessment: developing assessment criteria for Masters-level dissertations. *Brookes eJournal of Learning and Teaching* , 1(2).



References (contd.)

- Van Eeten, Michel J.G. (2001) Recasting Intractable Policy Issues: The Wider Implications of the Netherlands Civil Aviation Controversy, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 20(3):391-414**
- Wharton, S. (2003) Defining appropriate criteria for the assessment of master's level TESOL Assignments. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28(6), pp.649-664.**