Case 11

Multiple Approaches to Reflection as a Key Component of Assessment

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11.1 Context

The School of Education Studies, which is located within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Dublin City University (DCU), offers a number of programmes at under-graduate and post-graduate level. This case study examines one element related to assessment and professional development of teachers and trainers within the School. The *BSc in Education and Training* is offered on a part-time or full-time basis for those interested in training or entering the field of Vocational Education and Training with particular emphasis on Adult education. The part-time course is designed for those who wish to develop knowledge and skills in the field of Education and Training, theory and practice and for those who wish to pursue a career in teaching/training in Adult and Vocational Education and Training or in private or public sector training.

The programme offers modules in the following areas: Curriculum studies; Teaching, Group Work and Presentation Skills; Information and Communications Technologies; Communication Skills; Facilitating Adult Learning; Citizenship, Values and Multiculturalism in Education and Training; Experiential and Work-Based Learning; Teaching/Training Practice and Microteaching.

11.2   Learning Outcomes being Assessed

Due to the fact that many of the learners on this programme are already engaged in part-time teaching and training, one of the programmes' primary aims is to encourage a process of reflection-on-practice. Freire (1986) said *'action without reflection is mere activism and reflection without action is mere verbalism'*. This is achieved by linking the students' experiences to the conceptual frameworks provided by the programme and by relating this insight to their workplace.

This case study focuses on the learning outcomes of two separate modules within the programme: *Supervised Work-Based Practice* (*SWBP*) and *Microteaching*. Using *'constructive alignment'* (Biggs, 1996), the assessors are interested in the students not only having an understanding of the skills and knowledge required as a teacher/trainer but also the 'higher order elements' leading to a deep understanding of themselves and the environment they are working in. The emphasis on *'reflection'* is crucial to the assessment as the School aims to produce students who are not only *knowledgeable* but *competent*.

On the completion of these related modules the learners will be able to:

- Plan, implement and evaluate a broad range of generic teaching and facilitation skills in both the laboratory and the learning centre environment.

- Engage in peer based critical reflection on the process of skill development and implementation.

- Observe and describe the key interactions in a range of learning situations.

- Understand and explain the link between laboratory skills practice and learning episode implementation.

- Demonstrate in the work-based or simulated practice situation a high level of competence in planning, implementing, assessing and evaluating their teaching/facilitation of learners.

- Work collaboratively to practice and evaluate specific competencies.

11.3   Assessment Procedures/Details

The practical ways in which reflective practice is featured in assessment contexts can be found in the School's Teaching Practice Module: SWBP (Supervised Work Based Practice). Here, the students are placed in an educational/training setting where they practice and implement a range of teaching, facilitation and evaluation strategies. The module allows the students to engage in a substantial period of guided and self-guided work-based teaching practice.

As part of the assessment of the module, the students engage in *peer-based critical reflection* on the process. They also observe and describe the key interactions in a learning situation. By engaging in this process, the students' understanding of the link between

skills practice and classroom implementation is developed. The students' understanding of their own approaches to assessment in educational settings is also developed through implementation, practice and *reflection*.

The student is offered other opportunities to engage in *personal reflection.* One such method is a written assignment, which recounts the students' experiences of and *reflections* on their supervised teaching programme. In addition, and running concurrently throughout the module, the student engages with a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which is hosted by the University. Here, the student *reflects* online on his/her teaching practice experiences with his/her peers. The module coordinator and the external examiners can also access this dialogue. These *reflections* allow the student to access support and guidance throughout the process and gain a deeper understanding of themselves as practitioners.

The complete SWBP Process is summarised in Table 11.1.

Another example of *reflective practice* in the assessment methods used by the School in its modules can be found in the Microteaching module. This involves two students, working as a team, to deliver a series of short lessons over a semester, in an authentic or simulated learning environment, to a number of their peers using a range of teaching strategies and resources. This process is digitally recorded and then critically analysed by an external teaching expert and the student pair. This process is peer-reviewed by the student teachers and their student group under the supervision of the teaching expert, once again, using DCU's VLE called Moodle. The peer review occurs at the end of each teaching episode with the learning and amendments to the students' practice implemented in the following week's teaching. It is this process of reflecting on action that is crucial to the student learning. This element of the assessment ensures that the student is involved in a continuous cycle of learning, doing, *reflecting*, amending and re-planning. This cycle ensures that the students are given the skills to continually *reflect* on and improve their practice as teachers. The students also *reflect* individually on their Microteaching experiences in an end of module essay, which is also posted on the VLE to seek further peer comments.

An outline of the assessment approaches in the Microteaching module is given in Table 11.2.

Table 11.1: SWBP Process

Student Activity	Assessment Process
1. Student Teacher delivers first observed lesson in Educational/ Training environment. This lesson takes place in the early stages of a twelve week teaching block that the student delivers in the Education/ Training environment.	1. First visiting Teaching/Training expert from University observes lesson and after the lesson meets with the student teacher to discuss with the student and agree on areas of achievement and areas for development in their teaching practice.
2. Student delivers second observed lesson. This lesson usually takes place towards the end of the twelve week block.	2. Second visiting Teaching/Training expert from University observes lesson and after the lesson meets with the student teacher to discuss with the student and agree on areas of achievement and areas for development in their teaching practice. The visiting experts then meet to discuss the student's teaching practice and to agree on a mark for this element of the assessment.
3. Throughout the teaching block the student teacher uses the Virtual Learning Environment in DCU called *Moodle* to reflect online on their teaching practice experiences and learning.	3. This online environment is accessed by the student teacher's peers and course co-ordinator. This forum facilitates ongoing guidance and support from three perspectives: - the student's own reflections; - the student's fellow trainee teacher/trainers; and - the course co-ordinator.
4. The student completes an individual written assignment which reflects on their experiences of, and learning from, their teaching/training.	4. The written assignment is corrected and marked by the course co-ordinator.

Table 11.2: Reflection within the Microteaching Process

Student Activity	Assessment Process
1. Student teaching pair delivers a short 10 minute session to a small group of their peers. They practice a specific teaching skill or set of skills.	1. This process is video-taped by the students. The teaching pair views the video tape and reflects on the specific element(s) of their teaching practice with a teaching/training expert using a specially designed assessment sheet.
2. Student teaching pair delivers a second short 10 minute session to a small group of their peers. They practice another specific teaching skill or set of skills. This process is repeated over the course of the semester.	2. This process is again video-taped by the students. The teaching pair views the video tape and reflects on the specific element(s) of their teaching practice with a teaching/training expert using a specially designed assessment sheet.
3. Towards the end of the semester, the student pair delivers a lesson to their peers which incorporates all of the teaching skills they have been using up to this point.	3. The video-tape of this session is viewed and reflected on by the teaching pair and their peers using the same assessment sheet.
4. The students complete a written assignment which reflects on their microteaching experiences and understandings.	4. This assignment is corrected and marked by the teaching/training expert. The entire process allows the student to implement teaching strategies in a controlled environment, to reflect on their practice with the support of their peers and supervisors and to analyse and reflect on their experiences in a written assignment.

11.4 Strengths and Limitations

11.4.1 Strengths

The constant reiteration of the philosophy and practice of continuous *reflection* in the examples outlined above ensures that the student is engaged in a detailed, continuous examination of their own practice. The student is encouraged to find and develop the links between practice and theory through this cyclical process. This mechanism allows the student to firmly focus on the relationships that exist between all elements of the teaching and learning process, which, in turn, emphasises the primacy of the relationship between assessment and learning.

11.4.2 Limitations

As the School continues to grow it may not be possible to have as many direct reflective feedback meetings with peers or tutors. Visits by tutors and supervisors to workplaces can also be financially restrictive. However with the introduction of VLEs this, perhaps, is the way forward, as it is an inexpensive and accessible forum that does not require students or supervisors to be *in situ*.

11.5 Contributor's Reflections on the Assessment

Reflection, as part of assessment in higher education, is not new. Kolb (1984) identified reflection as playing a key role in experiential learning. Added to this, Schön (1983) argued that reflection is necessary for practitioners to improve professional judgements and understanding of new situations. Within the experiential learning model, according to Brown and Knight (1994), feedback as part of the reflection process can also be an excellent motivator to promote the student's engagement with a task or assignment. Clearly, the experience of reflection in assessment is beneficial to the students. They learn about the complexities of action, reflection and improving their own practice and begin to comprehend the relationship between theory and the nuances of their own real life experiences guided by feelings and emotions (Boud *et al.*, 1985). To ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable, a multiplicity of methods approach is used. In educational settings, especially in the area of vocational and interdisciplinary courses, adopting a multiplicity of assessments can result in a more accurate picture of student achievement. By combining multiple observers, methods, and empirical materials, educators and assessors can hope to overcome the weaknesses, inherent biases and problems that may be contained within single method, single-observer assessment techniques. Using a multiplicity of methods is a form of triangulation and, within assessment, it may become an alternative to traditional vocabulary, such as, reliability and validity.

11.6 Bibliography

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