Evaluation of teaching and courses:
Reframing traditional understandings and practices

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Reframing traditional understandings and practices

Case Studies: Caroline Khene; Helena van Coller; Jonathan Davy; Paul Mensah; Mark de Vos;
Monwabisi Peter; Nicky van der Poel; Joy Owen; Kelcey Brock; Miriam Mattison; Mosiuoa Tsietsi;
Dion Nkomo; Georgina Cundill; Brent Meistre; Dina Belluigi; Corinne Knowles; Deborah Seddon;
John Williams; Steffen Buettner; Hannah Thinyane; Tracey Chambers

Editor: Dina Zoe Belluigi

Cover image: 2015 Peter Carrington 'Cleaning our history' Photomontage

2015

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Introduction

The evaluation of teaching and courses has the potential to do more than assure quality. However, for many, the emphasis remains on the collection of evidence mandated from the top-down for assuring or furthering one's career. However, our responsibility to create opportunities to enable student voice and participation within our pedagogies grows in urgency. Being responsive to participants and other stakeholders may substantially improve and enhance the quality of student engagement, in addition to enabling staff to develop their teaching and curriculum design practice. Not all lecturers have explored opportunities to think differently or deeply about the potential contributions of evaluation.

By Dina Zoe Belluigi

This anthology outlines case studies which have emerged from an approach to evaluation which enables individual academics to practice a degree of autonomy in how they determine their own evaluation agendas, methods and approaches. This has enabled individual cases of both rigour and creativity when it comes to the collection of data and generation of feedback on their teaching and/or courses, particularly in relation to transforming curricula responsively; enabling student voice and increasing student ownership; and creating spaces for practices to be challenged. The purpose of the case studies is pedagogic and to illustrate a range of practices and principles. For the sake of clarity some of the details have been omitted or slightly changed.

Contextualising the reflective, scholarly and transformative emphasis[1]

Only formally initiated after the first democratic elections, evaluation is a relatively new development to the national higher education landscape in South Africa. Due to historical, political and socio-economic factors, quality across the national system remains extremely variable and contested. Informed by international debates, the Higher Education Quality Committee (2004) has argued that quality promotion should be reflective, scholarly, and innovative, with an emphasis on self-evaluation and development, rather than external policing or punitive measures.

Consistently national Quality Assurance discourses have been explicitly linked to transformation. From early on it was argued that "a comprehensive transformation of higher education was required, marking a fundamental departure from the socio-political foundations of the previous regime" (CHE 2004, p.230). Through national audits of higher education institutions, the Higher Education Quality Committee had hoped to re-construct the concepts of "equity and redress, understood not only as a numbers game, but also as a complex educational matter in the transformation of institutional cultures and on the repositioning of institutions within the higher education system" (Lange 2008, p.1). A number of universities in South Africa, including Rhodes University from which the majority of these cases emerge, have adopted an approach of 'collegial rationality', with a strong developmental ethos of enlightening academic staff through critical, scholarly processes, which empower them to improve or transform their practice towards enhancing the quality of student learning (Luckett 2006). In this model, the academic who acts as both teacher and curriculum developer, is positioned as the key agent for change, with the institution offering support rather than policing evaluation processes. Thus student feedback; responses from peers (including observations, discussions on curriculum design and teaching approaches, external examination and moderation observations); assessed student work and results; and course evaluations, are not viewed in isolation but rather seen as providing valuable insight into teaching and learning.

This is what I do and this is why I do it

⇕

This is how others experience what I do

⇕

This is how I will modify what I do or what I believe in the light of how others experience my work

Approach to evaluation outlined in Rhodes University's Brief Guide to a Teaching Portfolio

Institutional policy explicitly links evaluation with research (Rhodes 2014), with the professional development courses

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[1] Adapted from Belluigi, D. Z. 2013. Playing broken telephone with student feedback: the possibilities and issues in transformation within a South African case of a collegial rationality model of evaluation. In Nair, S. & Mertova, P. (eds). Enhancing Learning and Teaching through Student Feedback in Social Sciences, Woodhead Publishing, Cambridge, UK, pp. 1-27.

encouraging cycles of reflexive, participatory evaluation practice. Reflective teaching is intended to involve spiraling processes of hypothesizing, investigating, reasoning and evaluating, which leads to modification and further investigation (Parker 1997). Such processes have fed directly into research conducted within the University, such as formal programme and course reviews, institutional research, and research conducted by individual lecturers (see SOTL at Rhodes).
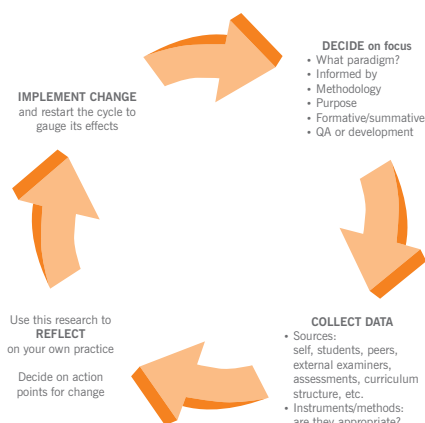
Approach of evaluation-as-research proposed in CHERTL courses

Transparency as to the purpose and the private or public nature of evaluations, are some of the suggestions provided when inviting participants to become involved in the research process. Principled ethical practice is encouraged, including informed voluntary participation, in official documents, such as policy and the preamble to the Feedback Assistant[2]. Emphasis is placed on giving careful consideration to such concerns as risk, anonymity, confidentiality, and the triangulation of data. Generating data exclusively at the end of courses creates missed opportunities for improvement in ways which might be of benefit to participating students. 'Closing the loop' by providing participants, particularly students, with direct feedback about evaluations is encouraged. When the results of evaluation are not communicated, participants may be left feeling disempowered and question the value ascribed to their opinions, with the probable consequence of less investment in processes in the future. The quality of student feedback in particular may be affected by students' perceptions of how their feedback is valued, as they are often sensitive to power dynamics. Reflecting on this, a contributor to this anthology posed this pertinent question,

> Do departments really act **on the** information they collect? The recent student critiques of curricula at Rhodes and nationally suggest that departments are not as responsive to students as they might be (Mark de Vos).

At times overlooked is the potential for evaluation processes to have educational value, such as modelling approaches to research. Moreover, when instruments elicit feedback for only a narrow range of teaching or learning behaviours, the foci may be mis-educational.

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2   This is web-based software tool, managed by CHERTL at Rhodes University, to enable the design of customized questionnaires.

Student feedback

Two approaches to student feedback which dominate are a neo-liberal approach, that creates the illusion of the student-consumer in a position of power to *assure* quality; and a social justice approach, informed by the critical tradition of adult learning, which sees student feedback processes as an important aspect within larger evaluation processes aimed at *enhancing* quality. These are underpinned by differing notions of transformation: as responsiveness to the demands of the global economy; or sensitivity to the diverse social, historical and cultural needs of the country.

Under the umbrella 'students' various valid and valuable sources may be included. Data might be requested from students who are participating in or have recently completed courses, in addition to students in later years of study or situated in their professional practice. Informal feedback, including student behaviour, unsolicited comments, in addition to work submitted by students for assessment purposes, are potential sources of information.

As with research, some of the problems involved in the quality of feedback may rest with the appropriateness of data generation methods used. CHERTL provides lecturers the option of using the Feedback Assistant to construct their questionnaires from a bank of questionnaires or customised open-ended questions and ranked statements. The process includes a brief content analysis of responses compiled by an academic member of CHERTL. However, the use of methods which have been customised by lecturers themselves is encouraged, as they are best placed to inform the design, through such considerations of context as, the purpose of the evaluation; the size and diversity of participants; which aspects of the teaching/ course should be the focus; and how the results will be used. Diverse options are presented in supporting documents to the Policy, including on-line questionnaires; focus group interviews, informal oral or written questions, critical learning statements; concept maps; free-writing; the Classroom Critical Incident Questionnaire; class representatives; and student-devised questionnaires.

Enhancing the quality of student learning

One dominant conception of quality student learning is the 'approaches to learning' model which considers student intentions and the approaches they adopt when engaging with a course, and how this may be influenced or shifted by the curriculum and assessment design. Evaluation processes might gauge the efficacy of such 'constructive alignment' of their curricula and student approaches (Biggs 1999), with data generation methods designed in reference to course outcomes and assessment criteria.

With widened access to higher education and more diversity amongst students, evaluation processes hold the potential for lecturers to gain knowledge about student experiences. Such an understanding is congruous with "developing a new institutional culture which is characterised by genuine respect for and appreciation of difference and diversity – whether class, racial, gender, national, linguistic, religious or sexual orientation in nature" (Badat 2011: n.p.). This necessitates a focus on the contexts, circumstances and conditions more likely to

encounter and maintain student involvement and investment. This sense of learning engagement, as inclusive of cognitive, affective, connotative and relational aspects of learning, extends the horizon of how data is collected and feedback generated. Perhaps due to an awareness of the nuances involved in accessing affective aspects, such as experiences of alienation and engagement (Mann 2001), the generation of such participant insights is approached in often unconventional and exploratory ways, such as free writing activities, metaphor, word descriptors, journal writing and imagery.

Enabling 'voice' may empower participants as agents within teaching and learning cultures and structures, and allow for learning experiences that are reciprocal. By recognising the importance of the student investing and exploring his/her personal stance in the learning process, opportunities are created for increased student ownership, responsibility and co-production in teaching-learning processes.

Individuals' teaching philosophies are influential in terms of how student feedback will be perceived and approached. Those concerned with the student experience may be more intrinsically motivated to shift from a strategic gaze, concerned with quantifiability and usability, to a more nuanced stance of listening, understanding and empathizing. However, this cannot be exclusively dependent on the academic, as student agency, motivation, power dynamics and departmental cultures are complicating contributing factors which affect whether the student voice is raised in the first place.

Critical concerns

Reflexive practice involves more than the collection, generation or interpretation of data, but changes to practice. The potential for feedback to improve teaching and courses within the collegial rationality model rests in part on the perceptions, approaches and intentions of the individual who is doing the evaluation. However, as education systems most often maintain and reproduce the status quo, transformation requires more than the individual agent's agenda, which may be constrained or enabled by the context within which they are situated, as is their sense of responsibility and accountability.

Whilst the booklet outlines case studies of progressive evaluation practice by individuals who have taken up the challenge, consideration must be given to concerns about the treatment of student feedback and their agency in light of the national transformation agenda. Possible solutions are required to address the paradox (Kotta 2011) of espoused approaches of transformation which, when coupled with an evaluation model of academic freedom, effectively discounts accountability in relation to transformation.

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Continuous evaluation for critical engagement

Caroline introduced the new module Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D), which challenges the status quo of Information Systems, a discipline traditionally focused on the application of technology in the business environment. As it is offered at Honours level, students electing to take the module are only introduced to the application of information systems in marginalised contexts of developing countries at a late point in their studies.

Both this course and the purposes of Caroline's evaluation practices are underpinned by her teaching philosophy around the quality of student learning relating to their engagement. Particularly, she aims to teach students how to think critically of the application of information systems to human development initiatives, hence exploring the enabling and constraining factors of which information systems professionals in developing countries should be aware. The life-long skills she intends for them to develop are those that can be applied in their professions, and beyond the business organisation context, to various socio-cultural and economic contexts.

In her bid to at first assure, then enhance, the ways in which the course scaffolds the development of these skills and her students' engagement experiences, Caroline creates opportunities for students to participate in evaluation processes *prior* to the commencement of the module, at key stages *during* the module, and at the *end* of the module.

Caroline Khene
Information Systems

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

- To conduct continuous evaluation throughout the module, as a reflective exercise for both the teacher and student
- To engage critically with students towards a shared understanding of module expectations, and concerns to be addressed
- To accommodate the emergence of unexpected learning outcomes.

How the task worked:

- Student responses were invited on the first day of lectures, after being briefly introduced to the module objectives and teaching approach
- Both lecturer and students continuously observed and reflected on how aspects are received or could be changed in the curriculum plan and teaching strategies, to encourage the type of learning engagement and critical skills intended
- Reflections were formally generated through a class discussion towards the end of the module, using similar prompts as those posed initially, to probe in what ways students' expectations were met or extended, and their concerns addressed.

Expectations and Norms

□ What are your expectations of the course?
□ What are your concerns about the course?
□ What can you bring to the course for your peers?
□ What would you like each student to bring to the course?

Prompts posed before their engagement with the course

Reflecting on Expectations…

□ Were your expectations of the course met? How?
□ Were your concerns about the course addressed? How?
□ Do you believe you delivered what you said you would bring to the course? How?
□ Do you believe each student delivered what you expected them to bring to the course? How?

Prompts posed in the last contact session of the course

Her motivation, for creating the opportunities for such continuous evaluation, is for both her and her students to be reflective about what worked best for that particular cohort of students, and what could be improved or additionally included. Those insights and suggestions then inform her continuous curriculum development of the module.

Caroline feels that a productive way of conceptualising evaluation is approaching it as a means of understanding the assumptions (pre-learning) and effects (post-learning) of one's teaching on students' learning. She has found that adopting this approach has created an 'easy-going' environment and atmosphere in the class, where aspects of the course and teaching can be responsively adapted as the need arises. Importantly, the atmosphere this creates supports the students' confidence to engage in the class, as by taking into consideration their views, she signals that these have value in the process.

Caroline has found that the pre-learning data generation provides a good understanding of the expectations of students, and how they believe they and their peers might contribute to the learning process. Analysis of these responses has consistently provided Caroline with guidance in terms of how the students in that cohort may be encouraged to engage with the course content and class interactions. She has incorporated these aspects in class exercises, including the addition of debates; full class participation on responses to readings; and encouraging their personal views to be communicated about relevant topics.

The data generation following the end of the contact sessions revealed aspects of the course that students perceived were beneficial and encouraged their engagement, in addition to identifying those that did not work well. Caroline is confident that because of her responsiveness to students' feedback, it has resulted in the students being consistently positive about how their expectations of the module are met and the nature of their learning experience. They often have highlighted how aspects they previously had identified as being of concern were addressed. In addition, they have made suggestions as to how critical engagement in the class may be encouraged, drawing from their experiences.

Originally, at the end of the course, students were asked to discuss their responses in groups, without her physical presence or influence. Whilst now she feels this may be appropriate at the beginning of the course, where students may still be unsure of her as the lecturer and her evaluation culture, previous participants have indicated that they preferred participating within a classroom discussion at the end of the module. An unintended but welcomed outcome of the process, is that they became confident enough to choose to participate in these class discussions and to engage openly with the lecturer on their experiences, perceptions and suggestions for the module.

Caroline cautions that this approach may work better in smaller classes than larger ones, as students need to feel safe to voice their particular perspectives, a climate which may be more difficult to create in large classes. She is increasingly experiencing this as a challenge within this approach, as the number of students taking the module has increased over the years.

Points to ponder:

How can we transform the culture of evaluation processes to encourage the critical reflection and engagement of both the student and the lecturer?

Persistently generating feedback to inform structural changes to a course

Having taught Administrative Law to final year LL.B. students for some time, Helena realised that some changes to the course were necessary. This was confirmed by students' feedback provided after the first semester, which raised issues about the course structure which then was offered as two semester-long courses. However, students were noticeably less concerned about this at a later point in their cycles of learning, when they had engaged sufficiently for the structure to make more sense to them. For this reason, Administrative Law has been described as one of the most difficult subjects to both teach and learn. Informed by an extensive evaluation process, Helena embarked on an involved process of re-curriculation which included submitting the proposed changes for approval at both Faculty and Senate level, to extend the course duration from a semester to a year.

In order to inform the evaluation of the new structure and to be able to address specific aspects of the course, data was generated from student participants via the standardised Faculty semester questionnaires of all LL.B courses which are administered biannually, in addition to specifically designed questionnaires. The general tone of responses to the Faculty questionnaire in April of that year was harsh and very critical, with students seemingly negative of those aspects out of the ordinary, including the amended course structure and the unfamiliar summative assessment. The status quo for these final

Helena van Coller
Law

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
- To provide the lecturer with continuous opportunities of improving the course
- To generate comprehensive student feedback of their experience of the whole course including summative assessment
- To involve students more systematically in the process of re-curriculation.

How the task worked:
- In addition to the standard Faculty evaluations, additional questionnaires were designed for data generation from students at different times in the course
- The data generation administered at the end of the summative assessment was firstly negotiated with students through the class representative, and secondly approved by the Registrar
- Students were invited as active participants of this process from the start, enabling them to witness changes being implemented, in addition to being explicitly informed of the changes.

year students had been disrupted, and they expressed their discomfort at these changes occurring in their final year, whether valid or not. Helena engaged with their affective experiences, made some changes to the remainder of the course, and informed them that she was planning to collect their feedback again mid-year.

Towards this, she designed a questionnaire which elicited constructive feedback and suggestions on specific issues. Students' responses at that point indicated that they were already more positive: appreciative of Helena 'closing the loop' in response to their feedback; feeling more familiar with the course process; and more willing to accept the year-long course duration. In addition to their comments were suggestions, perhaps because the data generation was more informal in nature than the standard questionnaires utilised. Parallel to this, Helena herself responded to the questions for self-reflection. In response to the second general Faculty questionnaire, administered in October, only 5 students responded, in stark contrast to the almost 3 pages of responses generated in response to the April questionnaire.

Whilst this indicated students felt no need to contribute further to the discussion, Helena felt their input was particularly necessary after their engagement with the summative assessment, to ensure the feedback informed her evaluation of the efficacy of the alignment of the revised curriculum. Thus she negotiated with students the option of responding on these issues in a questionnaire administered after the written exam at the end of the year. This would allow Helena access to their comprehensive perceptions and experiences of the whole year, including the important summative assessment. This was the first time student feedback was generated after a summative assessment in the Faculty. After successfully negotiating with students via the class representative, permission was obtained from the Registrar's Division, and a questionnaire designed.

Despite the students responding to the questionnaire directly after having written a difficult 3-hour exam, the overwhelming positive response from the students was pleasantly surprising to Helena. She was impressed by how they made a real effort to complete the questionnaire fully, and provide honest views and suggestions even though they would not personally benefit from the process. This in itself seemed an indication of their comprehending the value Helena placed on their input.

In terms of the emerging themes of their collated responses, suggestions were received about the course-work component and the possibility of an additional formative assessment, which fed directly into the changes reflected in her course handout for the next year. Indicating that the quality of the course had plateaued, the general Faculty questionnaire administered early the following year contained only one comment on the course structure.

Helena feels strongly that having an approach of persistent evaluation, and importantly, continual feedback and discussions with students, resulted in much more proactive involvement from them as participants of the process. In addition, it seemed to her that the evaluation process helped students to slowly comprehend the changes and get used to different ways of doing things, and to accept that all courses need not be constructed in the ways they had previously experienced.

Helena is confident of the validity of the feedback students provided after the course, especially after the final summative assessment, as "only then can a balanced view be obtained".

Points to ponder:

- Students may see feedback questionnaires as a platform to voice their complaints. Consideration should be given to the way in which we encourage them to provide solutions, and become more proactive in validly participating in the evaluation process.
- How might we use evaluations effectively to improve our courses without over-evaluating or causing students to feel fatigue, but still motivate students to provide us with objective feedback and suggestions?

Ensuring an effective and developmental tutorial and practical system

In a departmental system currently managed by Jonathan, first and second year students attend one tutorial and one practical each week, while third year students have one practical a week. In order to ensure that those learning spaces are effective, Jonathan adopts a multi-pronged approach to identify strengths, weaknesses and possible areas for improvement, by generating information from students, tutors and the work submitted for assessment purposes.

To understand the student experience of tutorials and practicals, insights are generated from a formal questionnaire, requesting that students comment openly on their perceptions of their usefulness and effectiveness and their experiences of the tutors. In addition, informal feedback is obtained through questions and discussions in the actual practicals and lectures themselves.

For the purposes of supporting tutor development, Jonathan focuses on inculcating the idea of being a reflective practitioner through engaging the tutors as teaching staff in a variety of ways. These include having tutors participate in a tutorial facilitated by one of their peers; and holding termly group reflection sessions for which each tutor prepares a page-long reflection on their experiences of tutoring. They are asked to specifically identify what seems to be working successfully in the system and highlight some of the challenges experienced, detailing how they have attempted to overcome them. Whilst intended for the purpose of improving their tutoring practice, such interactions provide Jonathan with keen insights into whether enough guidance has been provided by the relevant lecturers. Towards developing tutoring assessment capacity, he has both facilitated workshops where tutors are provided with "sample" scripts or pieces of work to mark and then compare within a group discussion setting, in addition to having himself act as moderator of tutor marking where he provides a meta-level of detailed, verbal feedback on the quality of that approach in reference to the criteria of whether it was fair, contained enough constructive formative feedback, and the appropriateness of that feedback. In addition, to ensure fair and detailed assessment of student work, formative assessment is performed in conjunction with the relevant lecturer.

Jonathan Davy
Human Kinetics and Ergonomics

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

- To provide students with a platform to highlight their positive and negative experiences of aspects of the tutorial and practical system
- To scaffold tutors' critical reflections of their experiences of tutoring, practical facilitation, and assessment
- To proactively enhance the quality of tutor assessment practices
- To triangulate multi-dimensional perspectives to inform evaluation of the tutoring and practical system.

Jonathan reflects that as students engage infrequently with discussion on the role of tutorials, they at times do not seem to take their own role in providing feedback seriously. Despite this, he finds that at times students have provided very meaningful and critical feedback on the system and their tutors' facilitation, particularly when asked to suggest changes to how a tutorial might be managed by a tutor or to comment on their perceptions of relevance or redundancy of the actual material covered in the tutorial. Jonathan has found that informal discussions can at times be more insightful than questionnaires, particularly if one speaks as the need arises to a sample of students.

Jonathan has found that the less experienced tutors benefit substantially from the termly reflective exercises, as it provides an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and experiences amongst their peers to manage problematic students or difficult situations. Jonathan cautions that the 'tutorial sit-ins' can be very uncomfortable for newer tutors. He has found that waiting until they are comfortable with the evaluation culture,

and have bought into the idea, is more productive. However, similar to how an academic colleague would evaluate a peer, this process is important to ensure that tutors share expertise, are well prepared and have given careful thought to how they facilitate student engagement with the material. While the marking workshops are generally useful, their effectiveness may be determined by the willingness of the lecturer to assist in the process, and thus has remained inconsistent.

Despite the sometime laborious and tedious nature of such a multipronged approach, Jonathan is confident that by understanding all the facets of the system, and the challenges that accompany them, appropriate strategies can be implemented to ensure an effective tutoring and practical system.

Points to ponder:
- Although labour-intensive and time-consuming, if responsibility is assumed by all parties concerned, a multi-pronged approach to understanding the workings of tutoring and practical systems may contribute to better compatibility.
- Should evaluation processes simply assure the quality of tutoring systems, when they can be used proactively to develop teaching capacity?

Gaining insights into postgraduate students' experiences of supervision practice

Paul undertook an action research process to evaluate his practices as a supervisor of postgraduate research. He was aware that questionnaires where students rate courses are the most commonly used method of obtaining students' feedback. The focus of such data generation methods is on aspects of teaching, such as aspects of instruction and learning. The intention is most often to provide a measure of overt teaching actions and students' perceptions concerning the effect of these actions on their learning experience.

For the purpose of his evaluation process, Paul developed what he calls a Research Experience Questionnaire in which he adapted similar questionnaires on undergraduate teaching to the specific context of supervision and research experiences of postgraduate students. The questionnaire was organised into six scales, with each scale containing four item statements which define the scale. Each item statement was scored on a 5-point Likert type scale, from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". He elicited feedback from colleagues on the questionnaire and made subtle amendments.

Paul then invited the participation of his four current postgraduate students, asking one to administer the process in the hopes of minimising the effect of power dynamics. The written introduction on the questionnaire explained the purpose of the survey to the students and their voluntary participation, requesting they remain anonymous in their responses.
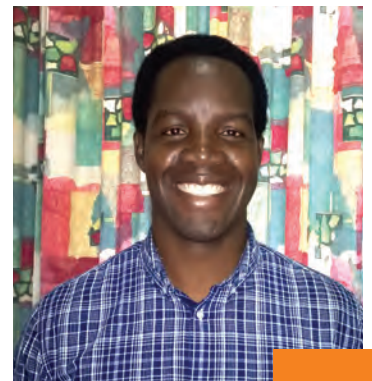
Paul Mensah
Institute for Water Research

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

- To provide reliable indicators of aspects of postgraduate students' research and supervision experiences
- To elicit student feedback to contribute to the process of evaluating the supervisor's practice.

How the task worked:

- A questionnaire was designed, drawing from other examples offered in literature on higher education studies, and adapted for the context of postgraduate studies
- The purpose of the data generation was explicitly outlined on the hardcopy questionnaire
- Peer feedback was elicited to improve the questionnaire
- A student administered the data generation process.

According to Paul, the responses were very helpful in pointing out aspects of his supervision practices and students' research experiences that were of concern to his students. In addition, the responses gave him an overall sense of his students' satisfaction with his supervision approach and relationship.

Through personal reflections and discussions with colleagues on such feedback generation instruments, Paul has realised that prompts framed in direct ways in the item statements seem to improve the validity and reliability of the data, and increases one's certainty that the student responses are representative of each person's particular perspective.

Points to ponder:

- Postgraduate research supervision in higher education is a complex aspect of teaching practice. Being aware of the specific areas where students need support is necessary for successful completion of their research studies.
- Whilst evaluation of undergraduate courses and teaching is more common place, do we do enough as academics to measure and enhance aspects of the postgraduate research experience?

Using RUconnected to generate student feedback for course coordination

The Department of English Language and Linguistics currently uses an electronic questionnaire to generate student feedback on all its courses. As course coordinator, Mark started using such technology for this purpose in 2006 and has "never regretted that decision". His experience was that previous to this, evaluations were cumbersome, requiring focus group interviews and completion of paper-based questionnaires in tutorials, which cut into teaching time and were tedious to process. With Rhodes' learning management software, RUconnected (which is Moodle-based), Mark is able to collect a wider range of data more quickly and with no data capturing delays.

RUconnected makes provision for at least 10 types of questions including dropdown menus, checkboxes, radio buttons and numerical data. Usually, Mark chooses question types that include open-ended feedback and Likert scales. Questions cover a range of issues including those eliciting student perceptions and experiences of the quality of the course, tutorials, and approachability of lecturers. However, he also asks about specific issues that the different lecturers of the course have identified, such as how a particular lecture was received; whether a specific class topic was understood; how students feel about continuing with postgraduate studies; and even broader contextual information, such as the languages in which they are most fluent.
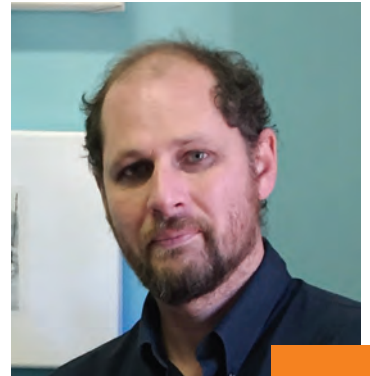
Mark de Vos
English Language and Linguistics

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
- To generate timeous, targeted, qualitative and quantitative feedback on complex courses
- To provide lecturers and tutors with effective feedback on which to improve their courses
- To enable staff to explore specific aspects of their curricula.

How the task worked:
- The co-ordinator compiled a list of questions and statements, including specific requests identified by teaching staff
- The questionnaire was designed using the RUconnected questionnaire function
- The link was posted to a student forum, with prompts to encourage responses within a limited deadline.

From which source do you find you learn the most?		
Response	Average	Total
The lectures	6%	2
The manuals	16%	5
The tutorials	22%	7
From all equally	16%	5
It varies from module to module	41%	13

A reproduction of responses which involved students indicating choices

Toward the end of each semester, Mark compiles a questionnaire and posts the link to students on RUconnected forums. These requests start off being very friendly, colloquial and solidarity-building, relying on students' wanting to be involved. Most students respond during this phase. After a week or so, the requests gradually shift to being more direct, alluding to the fact that the task is a DP requirement, etc. Using this graded technique of persuasion Mark typically achieves response rates of 80%-90%. Mark notes that this is much higher than other methods ever achieved in their courses.

	Average rank (and average values)				
	1	2	3	4	5
I found the presentation of the course excellent					3.7 (0.0)
I found the manual excellent					3.7 (0.0)
I found the tutorials extremely helpful					3.9 (0.0)
I found the course content highly interesting					3.9 (0.0)
I found the assessment very fair					3.4 (0.0)
I found the course very easy					2.4 (0.0)
I found the lecturer very approachable					4.1 (0.0)

A reproduction of responses to ranked statements

Mark finds that students offer better quality and lengthier feedback on RUconnected. This might be that they are more comfortable with online media than with the artificial atmosphere created by face-to-face and paper-based data generation. It might also be because after their responses are posted, students can look at the feedback provided by their classmates; or because they have greater faith that their anonymity will be assured.

Drawing from his experiences, Mark has found that a successful RUconnected data generation involving student participants requires a particular type of approach. The manner in which it is done seems to determine its success or failure as "the small things matter". Mark suggests that such interactions with students should be limited to one per semester by the course coordinator rather than individual lecturers compiling several methods which may overlap and pointlessly duplicate questions. This more distanced approach, of the coordinator requesting feedback, seems to have assured students of the anonymity of their feedback.

Mark cautions that it is not reasonable to send students a single notification and then expect them to complete a complex evaluation. The nature of online spaces being fractured should be acknowledged. The spaces of electronic and online communication are busy, polluted by surplus, overlapping tasks, social media and quotidian distractions. Rather, Mark has found that students respond well to frequent and supportive reminders. The approach should reflect how their responses are valued because "if the coordinator cannot be bothered to keep on top of the task then students won't be invested either". In addition, timing is important. Mark suggests a 7-10 day response window during the last week of term and swot week.

Points to ponder:
- RUconnected questionnaires can provide good quality data. However, there is a danger that this method may become less effective as the RUconnected space becomes increasingly more fractured, busy and distracting.

Student feedback to address student needs

Arriving mid-year in a new workplace with limited contextual knowledge of the students he would be working with, created anxiety for Monwabisi. Initially to address this, he initiated structured conversations with students who had experience of the course he was teaching. From that conversation emerged data which helped him identify which aspects of the course, teaching material and relationships among participants of the program he should focus his attention on, in the initial stages of evaluation.

Subsequent to those conversations, a questionnaire was designed to elicit student responses. Although often re-worked as the need arises, it is this method that Monwabisi now primarily uses to generate data from students to inform the programme he co-ordinates. As one of the university's transformation programmes, it is designed to provide access to students, predominantly from disadvantaged communities, who are assumed to lack important literacies required for full participation in higher education. Questioning the validity of this assumption, which is based on the notion that the schooling system would have failed to provide the essential computer literacies required for academic engagement in higher education, Monwabisi felt that more nuanced and in-depth data of students' prior knowledge and experience was required if his programme were to attempt to address the particularity of challenges encountered by enrolled students.

Monwabisi Peter
Extended Studies Unit

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

- To address the coordinators' initial anxieties by extending his knowledge of participating students and the context within which the course is situated
- To test assumptions made about course participants' skills, and generate more nuanced and detailed information
- To ultimately enhance the quality of the course by ensuring it directly addressed the needs of that cohort of students.

How the task worked:

- Data was generated from class conversations with those students who had experienced aspects of the course to ascertain emergent concerns
- Students new to the course responded to an on-line or hardcopy questionnaire about aspects of their current skills
- The information was analysed and triangulated with other sources of information, including students' performance in formal and informal formative assessment tasks, to inform a holistic evaluation of the programme and subsequent changes.

Monwabisi has found that this approach has certainly achieved his initial aims and has benefits for continuous curriculum development. Responses to the questionnaire helped him construct a more solid platform from insights that standard teaching-learning questions might not elicit, For instance, by knowing who the participants of the programme are, and the computer literacy needs they have within and beyond the academic context. In addition, participants provide information on their current capacity, which is often more than that assumed, because continual developments in mobile and gaming technology have developed transferable skills which make engaging with a computer for academic purposes enjoyable and easier than before.

As a result of this knowledge and its integration into course processes, the working relationship between lecturer and students is enhanced, as the course and teaching is experienced as more valid and relevant. Monwabisi feels that students engage more actively with him in lectures because they are aware that he is responsive to their needs and values their input into the curriculum.

Monwabisi cautions that this approach is time consuming, and may not be received positively by all lecturers involved in coordinated courses. He also feels it prudent to note that, while analysis of this information has been beneficial to the ways in which the curriculum and teaching have developed and have enhanced the ethos of the teaching-learning relationships, it may create unexpected additional 'problems' when it comes to the ways in which the curriculum purpose is negotiated. For instance, in the case of this programme, fundamental questions have emerged about the structures that determine which students are enrolled.

Points to ponder:

- Should we allow assumptions to inform our constructions of our students and in turn curriculum design, especially in subjects where there is continual and dynamic change?
- How might the value of such data be productively extended to other teaching contexts and courses, rather than be limited to the silos of our own practices? Do we not have some responsibility to the students participating in these processes to not fatigue them by repeating similar requests?

Enabling affective responses within questionnaires

For some time, Nicky had been concerned with her students' apparent sense of alienation from their learning, in addition to their mutual estrangement in the teaching-learning relationship. In tandem with making various student engagement-related innovations to her curriculum, she began to consider how she might enliven her data generation instruments so as to connect with the affective aspects of her students' learning experience. While questionnaires often have a cognitive emphasis, she wondered if there was place for a humanising approach to data generation.

In a conversation with a peer, Nicky was introduced to the idea of using emoticons in questionnaires. These images of 'smiley' and 'not-so-smiley' faces, or sequences of keyboard characters which represent a human face, carry associations of emotion or attitude. Enabling students to select their response to various statements, questions and prompts, she offered the choice of various faces captioned by word descriptors.

☺	☺	☺	☹	☹
Definitely	Yes	I'm not sure	A bit	Not at all

Choices students were offered for their responses

Students responded positively, with one commenting that "most questionnaires are relatively boring and long…the respondent does not truly give accurate or truthful answers due to the monotony of the line of questioning. The appearance of [this] questionnaire made it more appealing to engage in."

The emoticon innovation led Nicky to consider including further elements in the questionnaire which would cohere with a more informal 'feel'. Instead of using the third person, she began to address students directly at the beginning of each questionnaire, outlining the focus of the research and calling for questions or comments, so that students understood why they had been invited to participate and what would be 'done' with their feedback. She emphasised that she would feed back to students, in turn. Emphasizing the value of the process for students' self-reflection, Nicky included the statement, "I would very much like your input but if you'd rather not hand in your sheet, the exercise will then have been for your own reflection."

Nicky van der Poel
TAI and Ncedana Peer
Mentoring Programmes

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
- To conceptualise evaluation interactions between students and facilitator as a dialogue
- To enable students to respond authentically and critically about their personal experience of the curriculum, so as to enhance the quality of feedback and their self-reflections, which would enrich their own and the next teaching-learning cycle
- To extend the humanistic approach created in the classroom.

Each questionnaire statement was personalised by being written in the first person, such as "Writing the assignments gave me the opportunity to reflect on what I had learned." In addition, Nicky referred to herself by her first name, rather than as "the lecturer", such as "Nicky's questions enabled me to think more deeply." In such ways, she sought to decrease potential power imbalances and shift the interaction from the general to a more particular dialogue.

Nicky found that the affective accent of her revised approach to data generation seemed to motivate students to participate more authentically in the evaluation-as-research partnership. In contemplating the value of emoticons, a student remarked: "Seeing the 'smiley' pictures helped me to really delve into how I felt about the question." Nicky feels that the use of emoticons engaged her students in an 'unconventional' questionnaire language, which enabled her access to their familiar world, rather than expecting them to step into her own. To her, this made the data generation instrument "immediately relevant and alive".

Nicky's experience has been that the creation of an open, friendly and non-coercive space holds the potential to humanise the data generation process. Students and teacher became joint participants in meaning-making rather than information being extracted from 'them', the objectified, docile 'researched'. Nicky likes to think that this approach individualises students and renders them less invisible, and they are less likely to feel like cogs in a system of information production.

Her initial concern when reflecting on possible limitations of this affective approach to data collection was that it may not be appropriate to all students or in all disciplines. However, as many are now familiar with emoticons through social media, it possibly offers a universal language which each student could identify with to some extent.

Nicky cautions that this approach to data generation demands intention, time and energy. The conditions for a purposeful, humanising learning space were created over time by engaging in genuine relationships between teacher and students. She suggests that evaluation practices should be congruent with one's teaching philosophy, otherwise it may lack coherence and potentially do more harm than good.

Points to ponder:

- Questionnaires which include an affective emphasis can enable students to deeply engage with their thoughts and experiences of teaching and courses, as well as their own learning.
- How might the (mis)use of questionnaires enable or constrain one's ability to hear and interpret student voice?

Creating safety through inclusion of student reflection

In the second year of the political and economic Anthropology course Power and Wealth which Joy teaches, students' assumptions about their localised knowledge of Grahamstown, South Africa and the global political economy are interrogated.

In her curriculum design, Joy conceptualises evaluation as a means not only to enhance the quality of the curriculum as she intends it, but particularly as it relates to students' learning and experience throughout the course. Towards this, she generates responses of students' prior knowledge and experience of poverty, power and wealth at the start of the term. She asks specifically that students provide definitions of poverty and wealth, and use these to position themselves as poor or wealthy. As the initial task is anonymous, students feel a level of safety to engage with these key concepts, and importantly to self-define. These self-definitions are the foundation for the next class discussion where students, in conversation with Joy, are able through the student definitions to access and assess the applicability of 'objective' measurements of inequality; create awareness of students' histories; and create a consideration of, and deep respect for, the diversity that exists in the classroom.

As the course continues, students are encouraged to reflect on their assumptions and understanding of course material in conversation with their classmates. This process often compels students to engage with their peers' personal and particular narratives of pain, discomfort and anger. This particular approach is intended to enable students' active engagement with the course material by bringing their lived experience into the classroom space. Through such experiential learning, this particular method encourages students to consider themselves as 'research instruments'.

Joy Owen
Anthropology

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
- To recognise and incorporate prior learning, particularly students' lived experiences, as integral to the content of the course
- To encourage students' recognition of each others' humanity
- To both assess and develop students' abilities to engage with material that is emotionally difficult.

How the task worked:
- Students were asked to anonymously define key concepts of the course content and their own position in the first contact session
- The lecturer compiled a list based on a content analysis of their responses and integrated this explicitly into class discussions.

Joy has found that this approach enables the classroom space to become "at once volatile and vulnerable", particularly as students discuss difficult social concerns like segregation, sexism and racism. She feels that through careful facilitation, the classroom can become a 'safe space' to enable such engagement by all participants, including herself. An outcome is that students learn the importance of managing themselves in discussions, and to think carefully before making 'throw-away' comments about sensitive social issues.

Whilst such data generation was beneficial for engaging these students in the process of acting as 'research instruments', Joy cautions that when one encourages the development of students' voices, the curriculum may become more emergent than pre-determined. Being aware of this may allow one to facilitate students' engagement with their personal experience in ways that are beneficial to their learning, even if this potentially results in the exclusion of prescribed reading material. Such an approach necessitates some allowance for fluidity in the curriculum and responsiveness on the part of the lecturer.

Points to ponder:
- How might evaluation processes actively encourage students to merge their lived experiences with formal knowledge for the purposes of creating more 'valid' forms of knowledge production in our context?
- Should safe spaces be devoid of difficulty, angst and volatility?

Verbal communication for eliciting student feedback

Kelcey teaches Economics 101 to a class of 600+ students. The course traditionally relied on questionnaires generated with the Evaluation Assistant (now termed the Feedback Assistant) which typically was comprised of a range of 25 ranked statements. The response format mimics that of a multiple choice questionnaire, a format that students would recognise from assessments. While the use of this tool was able to generate responses to predetermined questions and was particularly convenient and sensible given the large class size, Kelcey found that the very nature of the tool often conjured up feelings of stress, anxiety and rigidity amongst the students. It became evident that many students were reluctant to take part. In addition, they posed questions which hinted at an association of the process with risk, such as 'Is this for marks?' and 'Must we put our name on it?', despite the purpose of the questionnaire being explained and administered in line with sound ethical principles. This association was exacerbated by the administration of the questionnaire, which as per the standard recommendations outlined on the questionnaire itself, was not conducted by Kelcey. The presence of an 'outsider' inserted into the classroom dynamics created an often uncomfortable adjustment. In addition, as it was administered at the end of the course, Kelcey could not use the process to demonstrate to the current cohort of students that the purpose was formative, and thus their input was valuable for identifying ways to enhance or improve student learning throughout the year. Kelcey came to realise that these many factors did not create conducive conditions to encourage honest student feedback.

Kelcey Brock
Economics

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
- To provide the lecturer with opportunities to gain continuous student feedback
- To create a rapport with students to encourage open communication
- To give the students an active and explicit role in facilitating changes to enhance or improve their learning.

How the task worked:
- Opportunities for conversation between course participants were structured into the start and end of each lecture
- The depth and focus of the conversation was responsive to the particular needs which emerge from students' feedback and the lecturers' awareness of the cycles of reflective learning in the course
- Triangulated analysis fed directly into the curriculum development.

After critical reflection of these factors and the student feedback methods she had previously used, and informed by relevant literature, Kelcey decided to seek alternatives. A method was required that provided the opportunity to gain current and frequent student feedback that would inform changes to her teaching and curriculum that would enhance those specific students' learning. Kelcey chose to use verbal communication – an often overlooked and under-utilised form of gaining continuous student feedback. To do this, before and after each lecture, Kelcey facilitates unstructured conversations that start informally. As the need arises, she utilises probing questions to develop students' comments into discussions, being careful to provide opportunities for students to express insights into their learning experiences, and at times their level of understanding on aspects of the course content or skills. She then draws on such insights and feedback, triangulating that with her own reflections and other data, to respond to the curriculum reflexively.

Kelcey found that these verbal conversations proved to be an extremely valuable means of gaining student feedback on a number of different aspects of the course, both of and for student learning. Sometimes conversations were merely based on their learning experience, but often they ended up being an illustration of what students had learnt and understood. For example, a conversation would often start by Kelcey asking questions such as "What have you enjoyed learning about?" to which students' identification of a particular topic might incorporate an explanation and sometimes contrasting or confirming comments from peers. In one conversation about enjoying Utility Theory, a student was able to identify that he had experienced diminishing marginal utility in his consumption patterns of the previous day. Such a simple statement proved valuable as it demonstrated that the student had sufficiently understood a theoretical concept introduced the previous day to be able to apply it to a real life context.

From her experience of this method, Kelcey has noticed its value for eliciting a wide range of feedback on diverse topics, as the focus can be shifted more responsively in a conversation than in written form. Probing questions are valuable for gaining more depth and also getting a sense of how wide-ranging certain experiences are confirmed by audible agreement and body language in the class. The frequency of conversations enables opportunities for feedback to inform continuous improvements.

The conversations have created an ethos where more students seem to feel comfortable asking questions that they perhaps would not have asked or thought of outside of the conversation. In time, these have enhanced Kelsey's rapport with her students and have increased the ease with which they engage with her at other times when necessary. This aspect was particularly appreciatively by students, which they highlighted when responding to a more formal feedback generation instrument. Kelcey cautions that, if indeed trust is earned, students may not be willing to communicate with ease and honesty until a rapport is established and they feel comfortable to communicate openly and see the value of their participation. Therefore it is important to think about how much time is at one's disposal to create such a rapport and to perhaps rely on a complementary tool to elicit formative student feedback until such a climate is established.

Kelcey emphasizes that this approach, while valuable, was not used in isolation, but rather acts as a complementary tool to other feedback methods to gain a holistic and informed account of student perceptions and performance.

Points to ponder:
- If we are truly to model responsive curricula, how might we create an evaluation ethos within our courses, which then contributes to students' perceptions of cultures of formative evaluation beyond our own specific practices?

Free-writing for quick, focussed formative evaluation

In her undergraduate courses, Miriam regularly makes use of the free-writing method for evaluating specific aspects of her teaching and curricula at various points during modules, rather than generating data only at their end. Whilst this method can take various guises, her use of free-writing as a formative method of evaluation entails posing 2-4 short questions to students relating to specific aspects of the course where she has a sense that students are experiencing difficulties, or to evaluate a newly implemented strategy. Framed by these carefully thought-out prompts, students provide explanations for their particular comments and/or alternative suggestions to address aspects which they perceive did not enhance their learning. In turn, this engagement aids their reflection of their own learning practices.

In one particular case, Miriam generated data via this method after the results of a second year Functional Anatomy formative assessment were lower than anticipated. She felt that student perceptions would better inform her understandings of whether and why they struggled with the theoretical content, and/or the difficulties they had experienced in applying the theory to applied questions. Thus she provided these specific prompts to guide the focus of student feedback.

1. Explain why you feel the lecture content, and supporting tutorials and practicals, were / were not adequate for you to answer the test questions.
2. How easy/difficult is it for you to relate the theory presented in lectures to 'real world' examples / the applied questions of the test? Explain why.
3. Did you consult any books, journals, or other resources if anything was unclear in lectures or in preparation for your test? If so, which did you find most beneficial?

Miriam Mattison
Human Kinetics and Ergonomics

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

- To gain quick, focussed data to inform formative curriculum interventions during a course
- To gauge whether students perceived they were able to translate the theoretical content covered in lectures to applied problems
- To gain insights into how students perceived their preparedness for a formative assessment
- To inform the evaluation of whether lecture content, tutorials and practicals constructively aligned with the assessment questions.

How the task worked:

- Students were provided with a blank paper and asked to respond to three prompts, with responses of no longer than three lines
- Students were briefed on the purpose of the evaluation, assured of the anonymity of their responses, and encouraged to provide constructive criticism that would assist the lecturer in improving the course.

Miriam identifies efficiency and versatility as the primary benefits of this method. She finds it relatively quick to design, administer and respond to, and can be conducted at any time. Processing and analysing the responses is also relatively quick due to the limited number of prompts, and the succinct answers. It provides an opportunity for the lecturer to respond to the criticisms and suggestions of that particular group of students' needs, rather than curriculum interventions or changes occurring at the end which do not benefit those respondents.

Its versatility allows for questions to be specifically targeted at any aspect of the teaching practice the lecturer requires feedback on, in this particular case a class test, but it could also relate to a certain lecture topic, tutorial, practical, teaching approach, key concept or technique. However, Miriam cautions that herein lies the disadvantage, as one can only ask questions pertaining to potential issues of which one is aware. Possible solutions include offering students free writing opportunities without prompts to structure their responses, and triangulating such responses within a larger approach to evaluation. In addition, depending on how the course is structured, certain concepts covered in class may only "fall into place" towards the end of the module, hence the timing of the evaluation needs to be carefully considered.

Pedagogical benefits include students reflecting on their own learning. In this case students realised that consulting the textbook might assist them in understanding the theoretical aspects of the topic better when preparing for the next assessment. Miriam has found that having students formulate their challenges by writing them down, helps them become more conscious of them. Similarly, providing alternative solutions on paper helps them envisage alternative avenues to assist in their learning.

Points to ponder:
- How might one both focus feedback to ensure the validity of the insights gained, and allow students to voice feedback about that which one has not foreseen or anticipated?

Agile formative evaluation using student response cards

Mosiuoa teaches the Database Systems module of a second year Computer Science course. Whilst the second year curriculum generally engages students with problems from which definite answers can be arrived at, his course requires students to negotiate a set of problems for which there are numerous possible solutions, thus necessitating interpretation. It became evident to Mosiuoa that his students were having difficulty with integrating the mental modelling, interpretive analysis and pure intuition demands of the module. He suspected that this was probably exacerbated by the form of the formative assessment tasks, which detailed verbose descriptions of real-world scenarios in non-technical language (i.e. plain English). Students seemed to battle teasing out coherent technical solutions from the lengthy textual descriptions.

Though accustomed to usually deferring the generation of student feedback to the end of the module, Mosiuoa decided to elicit student feedback on these specific concerns early on in the module. This was both to better inform his own suspicions to correctly diagnose the problem, and to provide sufficient time for him to affect reflexive interventions. He felt it prudent that the data generation process not be non-time consuming for respondents to ensure a high response rate. He designed small, credit-card sized response cards with two brief prompts to which students could add their hand-written responses.

Mosiuoa Tsietsi
Computer Science

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
- To elicit student perceptions as part of a triangulated evaluation approach to a problem that arose
- To develop an alternative method to elicit feedback in a manner not time-consuming for participants
- To inform ways in which interventions to assessment tasks might better develop skills identified in the course outcomes.

How the task worked:
- A stack of credit-card sized cards with two trigger statements were designed
- The lecturer invited students to participate, explaining that their participation was voluntary and the purpose was to elicit their perceptions of the assessment task
- Tutors managed the distribution and collection of the cards during a practical.

Practical I Feedback – CS202
What I liked about the prac was ....
....
....

What I didn't like about the prac was ....
... ...
... ...
... ...

A reproduction of the response cards

Students' responses confirmed Mosiuoa's anticipated concerns, as challenges with both the length and perceived clarity of the textual descriptions of the assessment tasks were identified. In response, he devised a schematic in a picture format as part of the next assessment tasks. The schematic supplemented the usual textual description, and helped provide a bird's eye view of the entire problem, highlighting in technical terms what was required. It was very important to Mosiuoa that the schematic not replace the actual text because he recognised students should be prepared for the complex requirements they would face in the real world which are seldom presented in a neat, compact form prior to the design phase. As such, on the basis of student feedback, Mosiuoa was able to both provide and model a technique that the students could employ in future to translate words into robust technical solutions.

Informed by his experience of this method, Mosiuoa cautions that the casual, almost affective nature of this feedback instrument stands in stark contrast to more established methods, such as questionnaires, and as such may not be engaged with seriously by all students. In addition, while the immediacy of gaining access to the feedback is a benefit, such brief 'responses' may need to be triangulated with other data to gain more insight into the quality of student learning over the course duration.

Mosiuoa feels that a strong benefit of this process was that students were given the sense that their feedback was valued. This may be because in many cases, students are questioned about their experience of a course, but rarely observe the ways in which their feedback has led to fundamental curriculum change. Mosiuoa was concerned that students might hold the perception that routine feedback exercises are submitted to as mandated by the university, or used by lecturers primarily for their own personal or professional interests. He has found that when the lecturer expresses and demonstrates an interest in using students' contributions to inform his/her practice, it has a humanising effect, and redeems the power dynamic that exists between teacher and student.

Points to ponder:
- Would this exercise be enhanced in future if historical accounts of curriculum development from previous years are shown to new students? This might demonstrate how feedback has helped inform the framing of assessment tasks in the past, and show students that the teacher is open to adapting to unique factors that are relevant to them.
- To what extent are we using student feedback in particular to develop a flexible evaluation approach that honours such feedback and implements in-situ curriculum changes that can be observed and recognised as such by the participants themselves?

Establishing and integrating students' prior knowledge and experience

Dion started using a questionnaire to generate information about students' prior knowledge and experience of lexicography when he first introduced the Introduction to Lexicography module for isiXhosa 1 mother-tongue students. The module is meant to scaffold undergraduate students' engagement with the important disciplinary area of dictionary pedagogy to develop them as competent dictionary users. It endeavours to create a critical awareness of the pedagogical value of dictionaries both in language studies and transferable to any knowledge discipline; types of dictionaries; their contents and design features. This knowledge is crucial for the later Honours module Lexicography and Terminology which aims to develop students as professional dictionary makers or critical thinkers on dictionaries.

While from his own research (e.g. Nkomo 2015), Dion knows that dictionary use and skills constitute a key component of South African school curriculum documents, he considers it vital to establish the relevant prior-learning knowledge and experience of his students before guiding them through his module. This is because studies continue to indicate a lack of dictionary-using skills and culture among students at school and tertiary levels, especially from African language-speaking communities (Nkomo 2014; 2015; Taljaard et al 2011). To comprehend what his particular students bring with them to his course,

Dion Nkomo
School of Languages

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
- To establish students' prior knowledge and experience of subjects relevant to the course content
- To integrate aspects of students' prior knowledge and experience into their own cycles of reflective learning
- To provide a baseline for formative assessment of student learning and summative evaluation of both teaching and course design.

How the task worked:
- A questionnaire was developed on RUconnected before the first contact session and students were requested to respond before the second contact session
- Questionnaire responses were analysed and a general summary was presented briefly to the class in the second session
- Key issues which emerged in the generated data were integrated into the curriculum design, including revisiting aspects when engaging with specific topics throughout the course, and providing opportunities for students to reflect on changes to their responses as the course progressed.

Dion designed a questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended questions. Responses to closed questions establish either-or scenarios, such as whether a student owns a dictionary or was taught to use one at school. Open-ended questions ask students to offer their thoughts about dictionaries, about being taught on the subject of dictionaries, or what they hope to learn from the module, among other issues. Altogether, the questions speak to specific topics that constitute the module. The questionnaire is made available in both isiXhosa, the language of instruction, and English, the language that some students prefer, and is uploaded on the RUconnected module site. Students are asked to upload their responses between the first and second contact sessions, after an oral overview of the module is presented to them, so that from the third contact session to the final session Dion can draw from that data to inform his teaching and curriculum design. Following this, some of the questions are again posed as part of the summative reflective essay.

Dion believes that establishing students' prior knowledge and experience has been crucial for interactive learning and continuous curriculum development, so much so that he now utilises such approaches for a variety of his courses. He draws from aspects of the student responses that are relevant to specific topics in the course, addresses them directly in class, and places due emphasis where needed, while acknowledging students for bringing those issues and insights to light. In such ways, students find their contribution to their learning being explicitly affirmed.

In terms of evaluation purposes particularly, Dion utilises this activity as an opportunity to test the planned curriculum, firstly reflecting on it before it commences, and later considering how it was experienced by students. The data generated, especially in relation to student expectations, is compared with the feedback from previous students. Through this, Dion manages to get an early indication of how improvements and changes made from recent evaluation processes are experienced by a new cohort.

In addition to drawing on such data for his teaching, he revisits it for the purposes of formative evaluation and assessment activities, as he can chart the ways in which both individuals' and the class's understanding as a whole has developed, and later for holistic summative evaluation. Such processes have informed his research around the pedagogy of his discipline in a rewarding way (see Nkomo 2014).

Dion cautions that while students seem to be willing to participate in an activity such as this one, the generated data may be overwhelming for lecturers to manage if generated from very large classes. This could prove to be a lot of work for the lecturer to process in the time and manner required, particularly since substantive integration has to be done throughout the course for this approach to reap full benefits.

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Points to ponder:

- When effectively integrated into the curriculum, the prior knowledge and experience brought by students provides a point of departure to engage them with the curriculum as a process.
- There are important ethical concerns that arise when using data generated for teaching and research. Besides informing students about the purposes of the data generation (which may affect the honesty with which they respond), how can one use such data explicitly in class without causing discomfort to some students, particularly since the data may appear to point at a lack of knowledge and misconceptions prior to learning in such cases?

Evaluating service-learning through students' reflective diaries

As part of an honours module Georgina facilitates, which aims to build students' appreciation for the often controversial role of protected areas in society, students spend a week working for a conservation organisation. The service-learning component was structured into the curriculum to engage students with the often difficult trade-offs between people and nature in the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

Students keep a reflective diary during this time, and are encouraged to consider what their observations and experiences during the service-learning activity mean for the over-arching themes of the course. In the context of the real-life situation they encounter during service-learning, students are asked to critically reflect on what they learned in the theory component of the course about the challenges of traditional conservation approaches and the key theorists of alternative futures for conservation.

The diaries do not operate as purely personal accounts, but rather serve a formative assessment function in representing students' first attempts to relate theory to practice and/or to use practice to challenge theory. As the curriculum developer, Georgina then utilises the diaries to understand the extent to which service-learning is supporting students to grapple with the complexity of the issues discussed in class, and to inform changes made to the curriculum.

Georgina Cundill
Environmental Science

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

- To gauge the extent to which the service-learning component enables students to connect theory to practical experiences and observations
- To inform the nature of additional support where the need is indicated.

How the task worked:

- Students made daily entries into their diaries, scaffolded by prompts from the lecturer, which were formatively assessed by the lecturer at the end of the service learning activity, followed by individual meetings to discuss what was learnt
- Such feedback and diaries were then utilised by students to develop the summative assignment
- The diaries were analysed by the curriculum developer to inform a reflective text on the effectiveness of the service-learning component for the purposes of the course.

Using the diaries as a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the service-learning component of the course, and to nurture the kinds of critical thinking desired, was an after-thought of Georgina's curriculum design. The initial and primary purpose of the diaries was as a means to assist students with contextualising the theory learnt in class. However, the diaries became a critical space in which Georgina was able to see students finding their voices and speaking back to theory or not. For instance:

"What we learnt today shocked me a little bit... This highlighted the starkly different views between [stakeholders]"

"This got me thinking about the possibility of win-win solutions in conservation...In pursuing conservation there will be necessary trade-offs. But are these type of trade-offs worth making?"

Georgina contends that the degree of depth and insight into student learning enabled with this method has not been enabled by other methods she had tried in the past.

Points to ponder:
- The diaries did not ask the students what they found most useful about the course in terms of their learning. Had the lecturer asked, they might have identified enjoying the intellectual discussions they had around key theorists. However, based on the purpose of the course, the diaries indicate that service-learning achieved far more than those discussions could have hoped.
- Are explicit questions which generate data directly about student perceptions the most valid approach to gaining nuanced and in-depth insights for evaluation purposes?

Visual narratives to express experiences

Before his undergraduate students embarked on their final year of studies and individual practice-based research projects, Brent hoped to design an instrument that would not only allow insights into student reflections on their penultimate year of undergraduate studies, but also encourage student engagement with the conceptual criteria of the fine art photography curricula. Working collaboratively with Dina, an instrument was designed where the student constructs a visual sequence in response to posed triggers, creating a narrative which embeds the visual in a context relating to his/her learning[1]. The story is then shared to a small group of his/her peers, with the student acting as interpreter of the visual narrative and facilitator probing, contrasting and extending the experiences across the group. Important to Brent was that this pragmatically aligned with the modus operandi for art making, which involves conceptualisation, the creation

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[1]   Adapted from Meistre, B. A. & Belluigi, D. 2010. After Image: Using metaphoric storytelling in the evaluation of a fine art photography course. In Claus Nygaard, Clive Holtham and Nigel Courtney (eds.): 'Teaching Creativity – Creativity in Teaching'. Libri Press.

Brent Meistre
Fine Art

Dina Belluigi
CHERTL
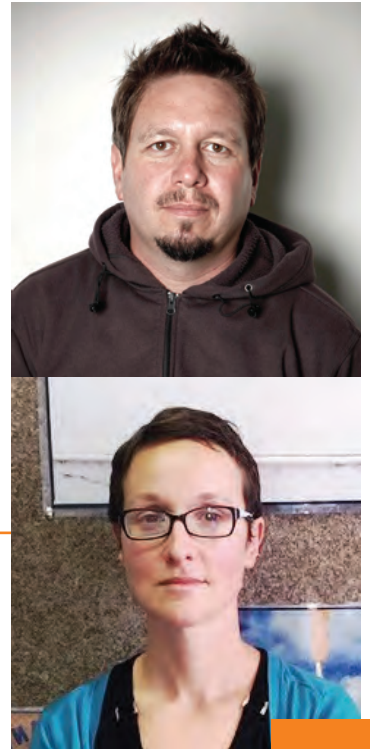
Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

• To enable students to author their own narratives of their experiences of and approaches to learning
• To create a low-stakes opportunity for students to experience the dialectical experience of being 'maker' and 'reader' of visual 'texts'
• To scaffold student metacognition of their individual learning process, in relation to that of their peers, prior to embarking on their final year of studies.

How the task worked:

• Students were invited to participate in a reflective process, facilitated by a person outside of the department, over two consecutive timetable periods
• A step-by-step description of the process was provided orally and in written form, followed by a brief discussion on the importance of, on the one hand, each person feeling safe to explore and discuss any relevant aspect of their experience, and on the other, the group's role as a support structure
• Students responded individually to open-ended statements by creating visual stories with the option to caption these with key words or statements. They were provided glue, scissors and a range of coloured pens
• Group interaction followed with the student-storyteller, his/her peers and an external facilitator.

of an artefact, which is then made public in a context with particular readers. However, to enable honest and in-depth reflection, it was important that the process not have any high stakes pressures attached.

The students completed the instrument individually, taking about 45 minutes to respond to four trigger statements which acted as guiding triggers about the course and assessment processes, such as

> A project, incident or experience related to your Third Year photography course, where you felt you grew the least.

> Describe as a story the emotional process of your assessments and receiving your results..

The decision to have these be deliberately vague is informed by psychological testing where it has been found that more open-ended triggers allow unstructured projections to surface. The student responses to these statements took the form of visual sketches or impressions. Choosing from the 'image bank' of everyday snapshot photographs provided, the students arranged the images in sequence to create a metaphoric story,
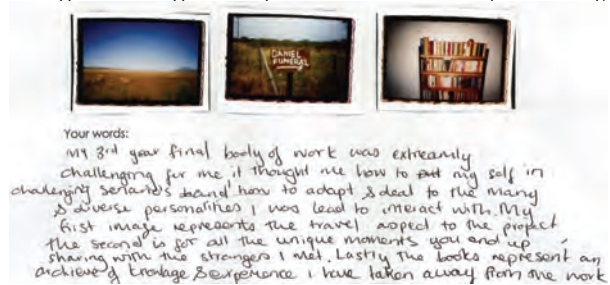
An excerpt from a student's response

Brent found that the generated data, noted by the facilitator, allowed access to nuanced insights into his student's approaches to and experiences of learning, thereby allowing for more sensitivity towards individual learning styles and learning conditions going into that last intensive year.

To gauge students' perceptions of the instrument, in the immediate days following this event, students were asked to complete an on-line questionnaire established through the university's learning management system (RUconnected). Students responded very positively to the process, many commenting that it was easier to construct the visual sequence than to "find the words". One student noted that, "It was also thought-provoking in the sense that afterwards one was intrigued to understand or discover the root of the surfacing emotions". Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that "telling my stories made me reflect critically on those experiences", and that "hearing their [peers'] stories, made me rethink my own". Their feedback confirmed that the process encouraged pluralistic perspectives of the individual experience of learning at a crucial point in the students' cycles of reflective learning.

Brent and Dina caution that creating an ethos or space for contemplation and freedom to play is essential when trying to establish conditions conducive for creativity to develop. Whilst the process of making the visual narratives involved a sense of play which contributed to creating a 'safe space', this was potentially threatened by the exposure inherent to telling their stories to the group. The threat of exposure was minimised by the facilitator, who rather emphasized the importance of 'hearing' pluralistic perspectives.

The research into, design and evaluation of the instrument took a considerable amount of investment. Collaborating to harness the expertise of both a disciplinary-expert and an expert in teaching and learning proved helpful.

A possibility for the future, in the interests of democratising the process further, would be to have the trigger statements student-devised.

Points to ponder:
- Creating the conditions for expression, sharing of and listening to experiences within groups of learners, requires a safe space to be established. Do we create enough of these to truly enable and facilitate such communal engagement?

Generating student responses at the start of a course

Corinne teaches a module on feminism as part of a first year Sociology course on social change. Her approach to teaching in the Extended Studies Unit includes getting to know her students well – not only does she see the individuals of a class of 30-40 students daily throughout the year, but utilises multiple opportunities to generate student feedback and insights into their experiences to further inform the teaching-learning relationship and dialogue. However, the feminism course involves a much larger cohort of between 450-500 students, with typically only a few students willingly participating, which creates difficulties as Corinne's teaching philosophy relies on student engagement. In addition, Feminism as a theory is unfamiliar to most students, although many have pre-formulated opinions on the subject. The module is provocative, in that it unpacks current debates about feminism in Africa and in South Africa, and is designed to challenge what students know and think they know about feminism and inequality. It uses current examples, and stresses the intersectionality of inequality in a varied class where many instances of inequality are experienced and perpetuated daily. In order to set the tone for personal engagement, even when it is difficult, Corinne specifically elicits student responses before she begins the course to generate data she can incorporate within her teaching. At the beginning of the first contact session of the course, students are asked to respond anonymously to three prompts that relate to the course content:

• what do I know about feminism?
• what do I want to know about feminism?
• what do I want the lecturer to know about me?
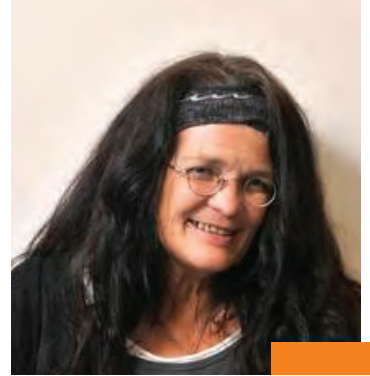
Corinne Knowles
Extended Studies

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
• To be more informed about 'who' her students are
• To create the conditions for student engagement and agency to be centrally placed from the start of the course
• To adapt the course content in response to what students, of that particular year, know and want to know.

How the task worked:
• Blank papers were set out on all the desks on the first day students arrived in class
• After introducing herself, the lecturer asked students to respond to three prompts anonymously on their blank papers
• The lecturer explicitly drew on these responses throughout the course.

From the very next contact session onwards, Corinne draws on the content of their responses. At first, this includes an overview of the content analysis of their responses, such as that 72% of them seemed to have a good idea that feminism is a theory that addresses inequality between men and women; or that 12 people said they did not want to know anything about feminism. Throughout the course, aspects of their responses are referred to or read out in relation to a particular question or comment, or in order to introduce a new idea. For instance, "some of you asked how feminism fits into religion/ culture. What do you think? Discuss this with the person sitting next to you and let's talk about it." In the final lecture, responses to the prompt about what they want to know about feminism are drawn from for an open discussion to gauge whether those expectations were met, surpassed or challenged, and for both Corinne and her students to find out whether the module has provided them the tools to engage with questions about feminism. Through such explicitly integrated inclusion of their own understandings, Corinne signals that students' own understandings are important contributions to how the curriculum develops.

From their responses to the question about what they want the lecturer to know about them, Corinne has a good idea about how these students present themselves and wish to be engaged with. They choose a range of things to tell her, such as "I am a feminist", "I believe that men should be head of the home", "I am a parent", "I like tea", "I don't know why I get up in the morning", "I just want to pass", "I want to know everything about feminism", "I struggle to understand if you speak too fast". Such variation and particularity in their responses helps Corinne shape not only the content of her lectures, but the ways in which she teaches.

Corinne has found that the benefits of this initial engagement are immediately apparent. This may be that before the 'teaching' even begins, students are involved in thinking about their own knowledge of the subject; are made to feel that their opinions have value; and are aware that they are being invited to make aspects of themselves known to the lecturer. Corinne has found that the discussion in the final session is not only helpful for her own evaluation processes, but it acts as a useful way for the students to revise. This has direct learning benefits.

Corinne cautions that this kind of inclusion of student responses works only if it is substantively incorporated into the module, and is supported by ongoing additional methods to elicit student engagement and active participation. The initial invitation for students to exercise their agency requires further opportunities for students to challenge what is being said by the lecturer.

Corinne has found that the approach has benefitted from her being careful to use the student input in non-judgemental ways; being explicit about her own positioning within the class (for instance, she as the lecturer positions herself as an older, white woman in relation to a younger, mixed class); and utilising a theory that has multiple interpretations. These aspects enable the conditions for agency, which is set up from the start, to flourish throughout the module.

Points to ponder:

- If co-production of knowledge is truly valued in teaching and learning, should it not begin with inviting our students to share who they are, what they know and what they want to know?
- Apart from generating student responses on paper, how else might it be demonstrated that students' ideas and experiences have worth and relevance?

Creating space for play and human emotion

Deborah has found that in post-apartheid classrooms students sometimes regard systemic racial oppression as distant history. They often note that they 'did' apartheid at school. Concerned by this, Deborah has chosen to engage her third year students with Toni Morrison's novel Beloved since 2005, due to its enormous literary importance in addition to its tangible socio-political affect. She feels that Beloved holds potential to demand the active participation of the so-called born free generation in a deliberate, serious engagement with the traumatic historical past so as to move towards a more viable future (Seddon 2014). But the novel is harrowing. It can be very challenging to read and this can cause students to resist the experience altogether.

In 2006, in response to one of her students asserting in a tutorial that she was so affected by reading the novel that it felt like "a form of sacrilege" to have to discuss it in an academic way, Deborah decided to alter the nature of the final lecture into an experience of collective healing. She focussed this through an important image in the novel: the African American quilt. Put together from many different pieces and patches of fabric, the African American quilt comes to embody the central focus of Morrison's text: the reconstitution of memories and the improvisational, collective nature of remembering. Beloved illustrates, in both the relationships between the characters, and in the reader's relationship with the text, that being and identity are dialogic, that healing oneself and a fractured community is only possible by placing one's own story alongside those of others.

Deborah Seddon
English

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

- To enable purposeful peer engagement among students outside the confines of the classroom
- To enable students to focus on, process, and share difficult emotions about racism and traumatic history
- To create a space for expressing human responses to a text, instead of indicating value for only formal academic dispassionate responses.

How the task worked:

- Each student was provided one coloured piece of A4 paper in the penultimate lecture to express his/her experience which they combined, in groups of two or more, to make up a new A4 piece of a quilt
- They could approach it in whatever way they felt suitable, including creating images, writing quotations, drawing, cutting and shaping the paper etc
- At the final lecture, each group displayed their piece and explained the how and why of what they chose to include
- The pieces were placed one by one alongside each other, as each group speaks, forming a quilt which was later hung in the department foyer.

Deborah thus extends this motif to create an opportunity for her students' meaningful engagement, which then informs her own comprehension of their experiences of the meaning-making processes in the course. She asks students to work in groups of two or more to construct a piece of the quilt to represent their experiences, which are then discussed with their peers in class and joined together to form an African American quilt of their experiences.

A photograph documenting one of the quilts students constructed

Deborah has suggested that, since the emotional tenor of the interaction should minimise pressure and create a feeling of safety for participants, there is no policing of the formation of the groups or making students participate if they are unwilling. She has found it important to insist on one rule however: that there should be no monologues. Towards this, students cannot present alone, but must work alongside at least one other student. The collective nature of the quilt-making exercise is quite deliberate in that it not only suits the content of the novel but also actively creates a space for play, for the inner child to meet with the adult, for the conscious to meet with the unconscious.

In their formal evaluations, most students have mentioned the quilt-making exercise as a highlight in their learning. One student noted: "the collaborative creative process of the quilt-making mirrored the themes of the novel and opened my ideas and interpretations to those of others." This was reiterated by other comments on how the exercise "forced students to sit together outside lectures and tuts [sic] and discuss the themes, favorite aspects and shape of the novel" and thus "brought everyone's ideas together and contributed to our communal understanding." Deborah cautions that a major obstacle to student learning, particularly with literature, is emotional repression. Cynical, jaded, or emotionally repressed students may regard the quilt-making exercise as childish or beneath them, and may refuse to participate in the healing possibilities that the novel and the exercise offers.

Deborah feels strongly that the benefits are substantive, however. The experience can be deeply moving, and the artefacts the students create are often noteworthy in themselves as "these pieces of the quilt are often small works of art, visual interpretations that track their own experiences of the novel's world". An unexpected outcome of this process is that, every year, the quilt exercise renews her faith in aspects of her discipline, including what narrative can teach, by demonstrating the extent to which her students are engaging personally with this text.

Deborah has come to value the exercise as an alternative form of evaluation. She utilises this participatory conclusion to the lecture series to really take stock of what the students have taken away from the course as people. This has helped improve both the curriculum, and the way in which she has enhanced the exercise itself. Providing a structured space within lecture time for the inclusion of students' emotional experiences has made a crucial contribution to the sense of student ownership of, and engagement, with the course.

Reference

Deborah Seddon. 2014. 'Be a Mighty Hard Message': Toni Morrison's Beloved and the Exploration of Whiteness in the Post-Apartheid Classroom. Safundi: *The Journal of South African and American Studies*. 15(1), pp. 29-52.

Points to ponder:
- In our teaching, how can we best work to overcome damage that has already been done to our students before they reach us – in terms of emotional repression, damaging socialisation, or the internalisation of prejudice?

Eliciting student feedback towards identifying reasons for poor assessment results

A number of interventions were introduced to an Accounting course aimed at encouraging greater student responsibility and active learning. However, after average grades dropped significantly in mid-year summative assessments, John questioned what role, if any, the interventions had played towards student performance. As part of a broader evaluation plan, John requested the assistance of a colleague from CHERTL to construct appropriate data generation methods to access student perceptions and experiences. Two questionnaires were designed, one for students attempting the course for the first time, and another for those repeating the course, who were well positioned to compare the course before and after the changes had been implemented.

John Williams
Accounting

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

- To obtain the class's views on the appropriateness of expecting students to take responsibility for their own learning and what that might mean to them
- To gain insight into students' experiences of whether there was adequate support to enable the expected level of responsibility and independence
- To generate additional insights into the possible relationship between the new curriculum interventions and the mid-year examination results
- To facilitate students' self-reflections on their learning.

How the task worked:

- A questionnaire was designed for students who had undertaken the course for the first time, and another for those repeating, with advice from a CHERTL colleague
- Administered through RUConnected, students completed and submitted the questionnaires electronically, facilitating prompt collation and analysis of the data with guaranteed respondent anonymity
- The analysis was triangulated with data from other sources and points in time
- Feedback was provided to participants about resultant changes.

The CHERTL peer performed a content analysis of the data generated from the questionnaires to identify emerging themes. John then triangulated that analysis with other sources of data, including a peer perspective, internal and external moderation reports, an analysis of the examination results, and John's own reflections as lecturer of the course and curriculum developer. Following this, a debrief session was held with the class to provide them with feedback on the results of the questionnaires; how this compared with feedback received from other sources; and the resultant changes that would be implemented. Informed by the larger evaluation process, two changes were made to the curriculum effective for the remainder of that iteration of the course. In addition, John was able to offer more nuanced guidance to this cohort, due to the insights he gained into students' reflections on their learning and what taking responsibility for their studies meant to them. Both the curriculum changes and explicit guidance significantly improved student results in the final examination.

John found that the student feedback assisted him by confirming some aspects of feedback received from other sources, and resolving some conflicting data. He found that the process provided new insights into students' perspectives and experiences which he would not otherwise have gained.

Following the de-briefing, students commented on how they valued the opportunity that the questionnaire had provided them to voice their concerns. They also remarked on how John's 'closing the loop' at the de-briefing session in addition to witnessing implemented changes, made them realise the direct benefits they reaped from having responded to the questionnaire.

John contends that the usefulness and quality of the student feedback was greatly enhanced as a result of proper forethought about the purpose and focus of that particular data generation. This was valuable in informing the planning of the questions, rather than depending on the standard questions posed in the departmental student feedback questionnaire.

John found it valuable having an expert perform the content analysis who was at a remove from the emotional impact of the issues raised in the feedback. When he reviewed the content analysis, he was thus better able to focus on what emerged that had significance for enhancing the curriculum design.

Points to ponder:
- Taking a pro-active stance towards addressing problems requires a certain amount of courage. Having the support of a peer removed from the context, but able to inform the quality of the evaluation process, may alleviate some of that uncertainty.
- Student feedback can not only benefit teaching and course enhancement processes, but be of particular value to students themselves. Providing them access to their peers' reflections may enable some to extend their own processes of learning, particularly in such cases where difficulties are experienced.

Correlating summative assessment results with student background data

In a comprehensively re-curriculated first year Structural Geology course, with overall successful grades (class average: 67%; pass rate: 85% in 2014), it appeared that the average results of assessed coursework and pass rates of white students exceeded that of black students by 10-15%. Further analysis of this apparently unequal pattern of race group performance in summative assessment revealed a large variability in individual student success within both race groups. Steffen found that this rendered the utilization of race as a distinguishing criterion not only ethically problematic but also unhelpful in the design of further teaching and learning interventions to enable more equitable student success.

In this case study, a common observation was that students with above average to high class marks did not achieve similarly good marks in the theory exam (and, less often, vice versa). The aim of this process of evaluation was to investigate whether or not specific characteristics of the students' backgrounds or their previous education might serve as possible predictors of student performance in the theory exam. If so, Steffen hoped it might productively inform his re-visioning of teaching and learning methods for identified groups of students to pre-emptively improve their exam performance.

Steffen Buettner
Geology

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
- To evaluate the impact of student diversity on summative assessment
- To inform the design of teaching and learning interventions, tailored to scaffold the achievement of equal learning success in classes of high diversity without compromising quality.

How the task worked:
- The Registrar's permission to use the POPI data set for your class was requested, and the data set obtained from the IT Division
- Key data of summative assessment was selected, and X-Y diagrams produced distinguished by diverse background criteria
- Correlations (or the lack thereof) were triangulated with secondary information.

Summative assessment of the class work (based essentially on practical and theory tests) and the theory exam was combined with student background data collected by the institution via the POPI[1] system, such as students' matric points, first language, schooling province, school type, degree type, nationality, race and gender. In his analysis, Steffen found that in isolation none of these categories provided any strong correlation with student performance. In combination of several of these data categories however, it appeared to be possible to tentatively identify a specific group of students for which further augmentation might benefit their success in the theory exam.

Steffen cautions that results of analysis using the POPI data set should be interpreted with great care, partly because the POPI data was not necessarily collected for the purpose of educational evaluation and research. For instance, the classification of school types is not designed for the purpose of educational research on the quality of secondary education, but rather as a data base used in student recruitment.

Moreover, results might be misleading. For instance, evaluating the impact that different first languages might have on student success in summative assessment could be strongly flawed, because data on the spoken first language does not provide information on the literacy in the language of tuition.

Despite this, Steffen contends that background data, if systematically applied to large classes and over long-term periods, might have significant educational research potential that could provide information to improve teaching and learning practices in highly diverse environments.

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[1]   This acronym refers to the Protection of Personal Information Act.

Points to ponder:
- This method is likely to produce fuzzy results that are often not straightforward to interpret. Large classes may provide higher statistical robustness than medium-sized or small classes. It may be necessary for courses or modules to be evaluated over several years in order to extract meaningful information.
- Such methods are perhaps most effective when curricula have already been considerably evaluated and improved upon, and triangulated with data from additional course evaluation processes.

Reciprocal peer engagement on teaching and curricula

Hannah and Monwabisi teach complementary modules on Problem Solving with Computers, with one situated in the mainstream and the other in extended studies. They decided to engage in peer feedback on their teaching and curricula, acting as 'critical friends' for each other's teaching and course material. Important for them was to ensure that students engaged with information and skills consistently across the two parallel streams, thus being clear in their focus that feedback should be aimed at improving teaching and curricula for the purposes of enhancing their students' learning. The process commenced when Monwabisi attended Hannah's mainstream lectures. At the end of the module, they met and Monwabisi provided oral feedback based on his observation notes. In addition, he shared ideas he had on possible techniques and strategies for keeping those students engaged.

After this, Monwabisi asked Hannah to provide feedback on his summative assessment plans. Her disciplinary insight informed the suggestion that the examinations have a central theme, rather than the different themes in each section as initially planned. This was later implemented and reflected upon.

Hannah and Monwabisi are both interested in placing students' learning needs first. They have found that this shared value underpins the nature of their peer feedback and the ways in which they utilise the dialogue to explore possible ways of enhancing learning opportunities for their students.

A benefit of their interactions and conversations is that they have fostered new ways of looking at, and thinking about, their students, even though as peers they are experts in the same disciplinary background. This may be because they interact with students at different levels of study. For instance, their assumptions have been challenged by discovering that whilst there may be validity in some of the assumptions of the literacies of extended degree students, students doing the mainstream version have been found to often have similar literacies.
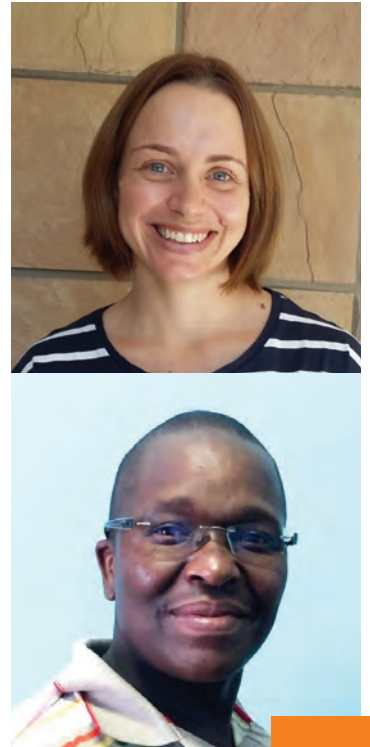
Hannah Thinyane
Computer Science

Monwabisi Peter
Extended
Studies Unit

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:

- To reciprocate collegially by giving and receiving expert feedback on aspects of the teaching and curriculum
- To ensure consistency between mainstream and extended studies content in lectures.

How the task worked:

- Two colleagues committed to a collaborative feedback process and clarified the foci of that reciprocal interaction
- Based on the one lecturer's identified focus on teaching, the other observed all lectures of that course, made notes for later reference, and exchanged ideas verbally
- To address the other lecturer's focus on aspects of the curriculum, the summative assessment plans were reviewed and suggestions made.

Hannah and Monwabisi suggest that those interested in such peer interactions ensure they invite a colleague who is truly prepared to engage in a reciprocal learning process. Creating a common ground reduces the possibility for any skewed or awkward power dynamics, which is important for openly sharing concerns and bringing problems in one's practice to light. Moreover, it creates a productive space to share ideas for innovative practices with someone who is similarly invested. Importantly, they triangulate the feedback they provide each other with other sources, such as analysed assignments, student feedback and self-reflections.

Points to ponder:

- Peer evaluation doesn't have to follow a particular template, and can be informal and tailored specifically for each case. However, it requires trust amongst colleagues. After all, peer review allows a peer to enter one's space and this could be intimidating. Mutual respect and reciprocity has made peer feedback a very enjoyable learning experience for these two colleagues.
- To enhance the quality of our practice, should we not do more to both gain and provide expert input into our teaching and curricula?

Reflective interactions in an informal learning context

As those partially responsible for assuring the quality of the residential system, a standard expectation is that wardens meet individually with each of their students after the mid-year examination results have been released. The purpose of such discussions is for the wardens to understand the challenges which might have impacted on the students' performance and to provide guidance on what measures the students might proactively take for the second semester.

Having served in this capacity for 10 years, Tracey found that these one-on-one discussions were rarely easy. From informal feedback, she knew that many students assumed the interviews would be an intimidating experience where they would be required to 'explain' themselves and their academic performance. She found herself spending much of the allocated time making the student feel comfortable enough to willingly share their challenges, both academic and personal, with little time left for substantive discussion on what may be done. This was exacerbated by the practical logistics of holding such discussions, which could range from 15 minutes to an hour, in the evenings, which in effect created a situation where most of the third term would be dedicated to such interactions.

Tracey wanted to change the students' perceptions of the ethos of this interaction. In addition, she felt it might be adapted to serve as an opportunity for students to reflect on their own learning approaches and actions for the purposes of taking responsibility for their academic achievement. For her own purposes as a warden, she hoped this data might provide her with insights into ways in which the residential space might better support students' adjustment to university life. From her PG Dip (HE) studies, she knew that students' experiences influenced the quality of their learning engagement, and in time, their academic achievement.

Tracey Chambers
Hall warden;
Information and Technology
Services Division

Goals of this aspect of evaluation:
- To change students' perceptions by enhancing the culture of the current interaction
- To create additional opportunities to facilitate student self-reflections of their own learning
- To gain insights into students' personal and academic experiences.

How the task worked:
- A questionnaire was designed on Google forms and a link emailed to students a few days before the discussion
- Each persons' responses were considered and utilised to inform the one-on-one discussion and advice
- Resultant changes were communicated to the students in a group discussion, and additional suggestions invited.

Using the open-source software Google Forms, Tracey designed a questionnaire for students to complete before the interview. This included prompts to guide students' reflections on the range of their examination results; to encourage them to identify what they might do to ensure improvement going forward; in addition to articulating what support they felt might assist them. They were also asked to share additional, non-academic challenges they were facing, allowing Tracey to have a fuller understanding to inform her discussions with each individual before they met. Tracey chose Google Forms because it creates no data capturing delays, with the information readily available even in cases where students submitted their responses shortly before the interview. The electronic format is easy for most students to engage with on their phones or other devices, and has a contemporary look.

At a house meeting following this process and what the students highlighted, Tracey spoke to them about being aware of the challenges and the resultant changes that were implemented, in addition to facilitating a discussion to brainstorm suggestions for how the residence could implement additional changes.

Tracey has found that the addition of the reflective questionnaire has made students more willing to participate in the discussions, as they are better prepared for both what is going to be discussed and the ethos of the interaction. Students also seemed more open when formulating their challenges in writing, which freed her from having to coax hesitant verbal descriptions which were characteristic of the interactions before. This substantially progressed the discussion to the point where they were able to discuss solutions in some cases, in addition to issues of nuance and concern. Importantly, Tracey found that the process provided her with more in-depth insights into the challenges her students face which she feels would not otherwise have emerged.

Students commented on how they valued the process, and asked that it not only occur after examinations, but more frequently. This indicated that although students saw benefits in sharing their challenges in terms of academic performance, they did not necessarily have the confidence to request this individually. The questionnaire provided them with an opportunity to be heard without having to put themselves in a position of having to ask. In addition, students remarked on how the process provided them with an opportunity to bring about changes in the residence and to assist their fellow students.

Points to ponder:
- How might one exercise one's agency, in the various roles one occupies, to transform quality assurance responsibilities into quality enhancement processes, which result in meaningful change for students?