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The University of Huddersfield
School of Education and Professional Development
Dr Lesley-Anne Pearson,

Issues arising from the assessment of PGCE Masters Modules
June 2008

Context: 175 students covering 7 subject areas and different age ranges:

- ▶ **Business Education** 14-19 years (with optional Citizenship enhancement) (24 students)
- ▶ **Design & Technology** 11-16 years (26 students)
- ▶ **History** 11-18 years (10 students)
- ▶ **Information & Communication Technology** 11-18 years (27 students)
- ▶ **Mathematics** 11-16 years (with post-16 enhancement) (7 / 22 students)
- ▶ **Music** 11-16 years (with post-16 enhancement) (40 students)
- ▶ **Science** 11-16 years (with post-16 enhancement) (21 / 29 students)

Two M level Modules each worth 30 credits

1. Module DMX5630: Evidence-based Practice and School Improvement
2. Module DMX5130: Subject Curriculum Package

Both were existing modules on an MA in professional development course run within the School of Education and Professional Development.

FOCUS: M Level Module DMX5630: Evidence-based Practice and School Improvement

Synopsis

This module provides a structured opportunity for practitioners to systematically study their practice and to develop skills in identifying and analysing evidence from practice. Students will consult with colleagues and pupils as a basis for implementing and evaluating evidence-based improvements to practice.

Outline of the syllabus:

An investigation of the relationship between collection of evidence, description of evidence and critical reflection on evidence in portfolio construction. Effective ways of collecting and analysing evidence from practice. Exploring strategies for eliciting pupils' perspectives on learning. Consultation with stakeholders - colleagues, managers and learners. Strategic action planning for classroom and school improvement. Implementing proposed changes. Evaluation of teachers' and learners' continuing learning needs.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding:

- 1 A critical understanding and analysis of evidence from practice, identifying opportunities for improvement.
- 2 To evaluate strategies for improving own practice within the institution.
- 3 To analyse ways to identify impact on learning and improved practice.
- 4 A critical understanding of published research relevant to the identified issue.

Abilities:

- 1 To be able to consult learners, colleagues and managers to clarify an understanding of the learning environment.
- 2 To develop improved communication skills in consulting and collaborating with research participants.
- 3 To construct a portfolio which selects, identifies, explains and critically reviews appropriate evidence.
- 4 To develop strategic action planning skills and understanding of the participants.

Assessment Criteria:

A critical review of their learning experience in the construction of the portfolio. The review will be contextualised within appropriate literature and will reflect upon evidence of practice. All learning outcomes are assessed through this assignment.

How?

The construction of a portfolio that includes evidence from classroom practice and from institutional and national policy documents relating to the following issues :

- Assessment
- Behaviour Management
- Inclusion
- The Curriculum (transition, 14-19, special curricula).

Portfolio to be equivalent to 3000 words. The evidence will be accompanied by 3000 word critical reflection on the teachers' practice, i.e. the student teacher.

What this achieves:

- Students show that they are becoming increasingly responsible for their own professional development
- To enable students to focus on an area that is of particular relevance to them or worries them or to focus on an area that becomes interesting to them within the school (e.g. hearing impaired units).
- Students develop strategies for improving their own practice
- Students show that they critically understand published research relevant to the identified issue
- 'Reflexive practitioner'

HOW THE ASSIGNMENT IS ASSESSED AGAINST M LEVEL CRITERIA:

National M Level criteria: *Students working at M level will be able to:*

- Demonstrate that they can address the title, the aims of the assignment and the module's learning outcomes.
- Use a range and depth of literature and materials.
- Critically analyse: principally being able to break down and examine issues and the inherent relationships between parts.
- Apply conceptual ideas and theory to professional practice.
- Evaluate theory and research in the context of professional practice.
- Enunciate, develop and support a case or argument.
- Organise and control complex material.
- Present ideas, information and material in a clear and coherent manner using the Harvard referencing system.

Quality Indicators for the assessment of this module

An excellent piece of work will have the following characteristics:

- Assignment title and aims are thoroughly addressed in a detailed and well balanced fashion.
- Knowledge of subject matter is free from errors and confusions and is applied to professional practice with confidence and insight.
- Issues are critically analysed through skilled synthesis of relevant literature and professional experience.
- Line of argument is well developed, evaluative and consistently supported by reference sources.
- The writer has identified the implications and relevance of present knowledge and experience to future practice.
- Evidence of flair and originality of thought and the overall standard is potentially of publishable quality.

A good piece of work will have the following characteristics:

- Assignment title and aims are well addressed.
- Knowledge of subject is free from errors and confusions and is applied to practice coherently.
- Pertinent issues are identified and discussed to some depth.
- Work includes reference to a substantial range of sources, developed and evaluative.
- There is a consideration of how current knowledge and experience relates to future practice.
- Overall the work demonstrates perceptive and critical insights.

A satisfactory piece of work will have the following characteristics:

- The minimum threshold for a pass grade is the demonstration of conceptual understanding and an application of key concepts to professional practice.
- There is a consideration of how current knowledge and experience relate to future practice.
- A cogent line of argument is developed drawing off relevant cited literature. Discussion is reflective, clearly expressed with few errors, and has some coherence to its structure.
- The title and aims of the assignment are generally addressed.
- The overall standard demonstrates adequate competence at M level but in a rather pedestrian fashion.

Work that is referred will typically have the following characteristics:

- Title and aims are not addressed to any significant extent even though the work contains some evidence of understanding.
- Minimal critical analysis and evaluation;
- Discussion draws off a limited range of professional experience and reference sources and is largely unsupported by these sources;
- Limited thinking about ways in which the present knowledge and experience can be applied to future practice.
- Organisation and focus of the work is weak.
- Overall the work is not of M level standard.

Moderation:

- 25% of assignments were moderated internally and a further 20% externally moderated by External Examiners
- 14 assessors of which 12 have a Masters qualification, and 7 have PhD / EdDs 8 teach on the Master of Arts in Professional Development course or are involved in Doctoral Supervision

ISSUES AND / OR PROBLEMS ARISING FROM ASSESSMENT

Strengths of the module and of the assignment:

- It addresses the relevant Masters level assessment requirements;
- students can draw on and reflect on evidence from more than one placement;
- The assignment draws on work from the classroom to extend their understanding of teaching and learning issues;
- It encourages more focused reflection and criticality;
- Allows students to see their work within the subject and as a whole school issue;
- Encourages wider and more relevant reading.

Problems:

- Took place over two placements: it could be that the issue chosen at the first placement school is not as big a focus in the second;
- Some of our students are not from traditional academic backgrounds and are not always used to writing academically or critically, even those with Masters degrees themselves
- Some students not prioritising / collecting evidence for work related to the assignment, focusing instead on teaching;
- Some school mentors not realising (despite training / updates etc) that the course requirements had changed and therefore encouraging students to prioritise teaching rather than to balance workload;
- Students:
 - providing too much data without actually reflecting on (need quality rather than quantity)
 - Misunderstanding of what constitutes a critical incident or criticality: e.g. they pull policies to bit without really understanding the policy in the wider national context and some evidence was presented as lists and not linked to other evidence / reading, thus showing limited progress in the professional development / and practice of the writer.
 - Focus of assignment = unclear in weaker assignments - tend to be vague.Limited use of texts and an over reliance on appendices but failing to summarise these;

What we have done to support students:

- Provided detailed writing frames for all assignments in all subjects and clear marking criteria;
- Assignment planning documents are completed by the students and feedback given two months before the submission date;
- Access to an Academic Skills Tutor;
- Increased personal tutorials;
- Small group tutorials to help students prepare for the assignments: Here activities will be undertaken that will prepare the students for the assignments to be completed and discussed. These will include critiquing articles, handing in lesson plans for feedback, planning and designing units of work, discussion on lesson evaluations etc.
- Mentor training focusing on writing at M level and looking at assignments themselves;
- VLE support;

- by providing examples of good work on BB, writing frames, booklists, documents or links to relevant reading, etc;
 - Course materials including Course Readers which available on BB;
 - Exemplar assignments / parts of assignments (assignment trialled for two years prior to its actual modularization);
- Quick feedback on previous assignments with targets for development which students can use in subsequent assignments (all marked and moderated within 15 working days and returned to the student);
- Sessions on:
- Research methods
 - Writing a literature review
 - Writing assignments in an appropriate academic style;
 - Developing criticality,
 - Using the library, including the use of Metalib
 - Harvard referencing,
 - Writing a literature review - range, developing coherent argument, synthesis
 - Reflecting and evaluating - linking theory to practice.
 - Developing Portfolios - what constitutes evidence?
 - Writing assignments in an appropriate academic style.

Note there are two H level equivalent assignments for students identified by tutors following the assessment of early course assignments and who anticipate that the student will struggle to work at M level. Only one student took advantage of this.

CHANGES MADE SINCE ASSESSMENT

- Module and assessment requirements to include a summary of each piece of evidence to show how these link to the evaluation;
- Mentor Training focused on M level requirements (in house and via visits);
- The number of Learning Outcomes was reduced and reevaluated
- Learning outcomes clarified where ambiguities were noted.:

Knowledge and Understanding:

- 1 Critically understands and analyses evidence from practice to identify opportunities for improvement.
- 2 Critically analyses published research and identifies strategies that may impact on learning and improved practice

Abilities:

- 1 Consults with appropriate individuals to develop an issue for development within the learning environment.
- 2 Develops skills as a reflexive practitioner.
- 3 Constructs a portfolio which selects, identifies, explains and critically reviews appropriate evidence.
- 4 Develops strategic action planning skills and understanding of the participants.