Using Assessment to Improve the Quality of Student Learning in Art and Design

The project

The purpose of this ongoing project is to evaluate the impact of a self- and peer assessment programme on students' approaches to their learning

The case study

The student group which is taking part in this study are in their second year of a BEd Primary Art programme.

The particular focus of this part of the research is the final assessment of a 120 hour project in Creative Textile Design.

What I wish to know, in this particular study, is whether involving students in the assessment of their own work and that of others promotes a deep approach to learning.

For this study I used two contrasting instruments to gather information. One was a 'fly-on-the-wall' video recording of one of the assessment groups participating in an assessment. The other was a questionnaire given to the whole year group.

Background to the project

The framework for the self- and peer assessment programme now used at Worcester was first devised and introduced, three years ago, whilst I was course leader of the BA(Hons) Graphic Information Design course at Falmouth School of Art and Design. A commitment to student-centred learning and an involvement in the Improving Student Learning Project led by Graham Gibbs confirmed my belief that assessment, as it is normally practised in art and design education, is the major contributor to students taking a surface approach to their work.

The task at the time was to develop learning objectives and assessment criteria that would make explicit what a student was expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of the project work given to them and also enable them to know how well they had performed at the end of the project. This explicitness would then enable students to be reflective about their work in a more structured way. In order to promote reflectiveness the course team established learning teams which had the express purpose of enabling students to identify and comment on what they had learned over a given period (usually a week). The focus on their learning rather than on the subject was crucial to the exercise for this became the site where students were able to articulate the approach (deep/surface) that they were taking to the project.

The learning team as a curriculum component aspired to the four key elements, identified by Biggs (1989), as associated with good teaching. By focusing on learning, each member of the group was able to explain and test out their ideas and modify them in the light of supportive comments. This supportive climate provided both the *motivational context* and *interaction with others*. Although much of art and design work involves active rather than passive work, the opportunity for *learner activity* of planning, reflecting and relating abstract conceptions through the learning teams is greatly enhanced. It is also through the learning teams that students can test how *well structured their knowledge base* is in relation to the tasks they have set themselves.

The assessment criteria were designed to cover the main domains of art and design practice. Each domain contained at least one set of four descriptions. The four

descriptions were progressive in their sophistication, each one intended to be compatible with Bigg's SOLO taxonomy (Biggs J, Collis K, 1982); unistructural, multistructural, relational and extended abstract.

It was through the conception of the learning team that the self/peer assessment programme emerged. As the learning team was a well informed group in respect to the achievements of its members it made sense that it should also be the site of the assessment of those achievements. It also made sense that if we were to truly tackle the problem of assessment and surface approaches then we should take the obvious step and hand as much responsibility as we could for assessment to those who would directly benefit from it.

One of the difficulties in assessment in art and design is in being able to differentiate between the quality of a student's product of a particular project and the quality of learning as an outcome of the making of that product. There is no inconsistency in a student producing an aesthetically elegant design solution but having learned little or nothing as a result. Equally, a student may well have learned a substantial amount and taken a deep approach in a project but the material outcome in itself does not reflect the learning. What we can say is that the material outcome, the art or design work, is part of the evidence of student learning and not the learning itself. It is my belief that confusion over this issue by both students and teachers has contributed to a misunderstanding of the purpose of assessment and its impact on student performance(see Gibbs 1992, pp 80-81).

In September 1993 I joined the art department at Worcester College of Higher Education. My task has been to introduce innovations into the curriculum which promote a deep approach. The most significant innovation, and possibly the most challenging, has been to establish a self/peer assessment programme for the art and design modular programme which begins in September 1994. During the year I involved 1st year BEd students in a pilot self/peer assessment to enable them to judge for themselves the worthwhileness of the practice. However, the 2nd year students heard about it and asked if they could also field test this form of assessment. From my previous experience of introducing innovations into a context of established practice I felt reluctant but what was different and interesting about this is that they were the prime movers rather than me as the teacher. It is this group which is the subject of this case study.

The problematic

The following pertinent issues have emerged since the curriculum changes, to promote a deep approach to student learning through assessment, were made on the Graphic Information Design course:

There is little point in having a programme of study which is intended to promote a deep approach to student learning if the assessment of that programme encourages a surface approach. Whether we as teachers intend it or not, many students organise their learning around the assessment. That is where they start. 'How do I get the best marks in this project'? and not 'How do I make sense of/improve my understanding of ......?', is the first question asked by a student taking a strategic approach to learning. In the absence of any explicit criteria the student will always default to the teacher's implicit suggested criteria. In art and design students learn fairly quickly what their teacher approves and disapproves of and, if they are strategists, take appropriate action. Satisfying or impressing the teacher, not the enhancement of their learning, becomes the goal of these students.

On the Graphic Information Design course the approaches to learning questionnaire identified over two thirds of the students in one year group as having either an achieving or reproducing orientation towards their learning. Students who display

these orientations in their approaches to learning often hold a 'closed' conception of teaching and learning (Gibbs 1992, p7). A characteristic of this conception is that students expect, even if they don't like it, to be assessed by their teacher or some other institutional representative. Being assessed by themselves and/or their peers conflicts so profoundly with their expectations that some students find it difficult to cope with, even when the procedure is demonstrated to be more rigorous, more open, more objective, more democratic and so on than they have previously experienced. The question is, therefore, how do you convince over two thirds of any group that they should adopt an approach to learning and assessment which conflicts so strongly with their established expectations? My experience on the Graphic Information Design course was that unless students reoriented themselves towards a deep approach to their learning by 'owning' all the issues related to their reconceptualisation (and this includes the politics of their educational experience) then they gradually returned to their previous expectations despite the nature of the curriculum and the assessment process.

Another feature, related to this last point, which has made evaluating the effectiveness of promoting a deep approach, through both curriculum and assessment change, more difficult, is that phenomenon that involves the concepts of 'variation' and 'reorientation' (House ER, 1974). Whilst reorientation of student approaches to learning is what we wanted to achieve, there was a surprising number of students who were willing to vary their behaviour to satisfy the requirements of the innovations. It took some time to recognise that there were students who were willingly participating in the learning teams and self/peer assessments and displaying behaviour appropriate to a deep approach who subsequently returned to the original closed conception of teaching and learning as the final examinations drew near. Differentiating, during the course or a project, between those students who have genuinely reoriented themselves and those who only vary their behaviour is not as straightforward as I first believed. This realisation emerged during the final degree interviews with students who had experienced at least a year of peer review.

The questionnaire is useful in determining at the outset what approach students take to their learning and enables us to make informative comparisons across time and groups but it requires fairly close questioning of students over a period of time about their learning to determine whether they are genuinely taking a consistently deep approach.

Part of the difficulty is that, for self/peer assessment purposes, it is necessary not only to enable students to recognise what approach they are taking but also to enculture them into the institutional and educational superstructures which foster the approaches. Committed strategists, particularly achievers, are therefore fully briefed to continue their surface approach albeit in the guise of a deep approach. They are effectively taking a surface approach a deep approach to learning. They are continuing to ask the question, 'What do I have to do to get the best marks?'

Finally, one feature which is presently insurmountable also seems to be the one that lets the strategist off the hook. The assessment procedure I have been using is criterion referenced. To all intents and purposes the BA(Hons) is norm referenced. How can convince our students to accept an assessment procedure that is designed to promote learning through the negotiation of explicit criteria when the final award is focused on a distribution curve that has more to do with elitism than understanding?

The study

Introduction

Prior to the project I spoke to the year group about their expressed wish to participate in self/peer assessment. I outlined some of the differences to their previous

assessment experience and alerted them to my concern that the anxiety on their part might be greater than those experienced by the 1st year since the have already established their expectations about what assessment should be on their course. I assured them that, as this was a test run, we could return to the previous practice of tutor assessment if they so wished.

Reflective journals are an established element of the course although they are not used solely to identify the particular approach to learning that each student has taken. Nevertheless, I pointed out to them that reflective journals have proven to be very useful in evidencing a deep approach that has been taken to a project particularly when the product is not a source of that evidence. Students on the course also have to write out a rationale of what they intend doing in the project. Again I pointed out that being able to relate original intentions to final outcomes can support reflectiveness and so provide evidence of the approach that a student has taken.

I introduced them to the assessment criteria (see appendix 1) and we had a session when they could ask questions about criteria and the assessment procedure.

They were grouped into learning teams of five or six and met regularly throughout the project.

At the end of the project we asked for a team to volunteer to be videod during a self/peer assessment session for the benefit of this study.

The research instruments

One of the difficulties in determining whether a student is taking a deep or surface approach is actually capturing, in a reliable form, a student reflecting on a task specific activity. In interviews with students, I have found that it can quite often take a while for them to begin to take a relational or extended abstract approach to the particular task that they have been involved with. Many students, in formal interview conditions, seem to prefer to adopt a distanced, descriptive approach when questioned about how they went about their work, despite the evidence of previous encounters with them (eg learning teams), which suggested that they were taking a deep approach. Eliciting evidence in this way can be a lengthy and expensive task. Also the interview format requires that students are having to talk about learning that has already happened. I wanted to know if there was any qualitative difference between task specific events as they happen and students reports of these events.

Another difficulty with interviews is that students may feel inclined to provide me, who has an instrumental role in their lives, with answers of a particular nature.

As the assessment teams were small in number, sited in a particular room, and participating in an activity which was designed to promote a deep approach to learning, a video recording of the event seemed obvious. It would satisfy some of the concerns expressed above and be a visual, as well as oral, testament.

In order to enable the students to reflect on both their experiences and views of the assessment and to provide me with another source of information, I designed a simple questionnaire. I decided to make it an anonymous questionnaire to overcome the concerns I have of students' perceptions of my role in the exercise.

The video

It was obvious from the video that the students were keen for the procedure, at least, to be successful. They were well organised, polite to each other and patient on those occasions when required. Their self-consciousness in front of the camera, if it existed, was not evident and it seemed that its presence was soon forgotten about. Their

methodological approach and commitment to the task surprised me somewhat as the novelty of the circumstances had the potential for creating anxiety. This may be explained by the fact that they are trainee teachers and have a vested interest in assessment.

In order to provide a critical perspective appropriate to the concerns of the conference, I looked at the video from the viewpoint of the strategies that foster a deep approach; the motivational context, learner activity, interaction with others and a well-structured knowledge base.

Was there evidence that it was a motivational context? Although the session lasted for over four hours the concentration of this particular group of students was maintained. There was no evidence to show that the student being assessed last was being rushed or dealt with in a less rigorous way. It was clear, as the assessment proceeded, that the students were becoming more familiar with the criteria and developing more confidence in applying it but that did not diminish the concern they had for each other. One specific instance in the early part of the session was their concern to make sense of the apparent subtleties of the criteria. They spent some time discussing meanings and interpretations of different expressions. There were many instances where they related the comments in the learning journals to the art work displayed on the wall in an attempt to determine what level the assessed student had achieved. What is clear from the video is that most of the discussions centred around the specificity's of the criteria and whether the fit between criteria and project work was accurate, rather than attempting to use the criteria as a guide for determining what SOLO level the student had been operating on.

Was the learner activity successful? Although the nature of the session meant that all the students would be active, what they were learning as a result of the activity was less easy to determine. Apart from the debate about interpretations, the only other obstacle that they were faced with was making a commitment about the level of learning that each had achieved. It might be significant that many of their judgements fell on the borderlines of the levels.

Was the interaction successful? Throughout the session each student had the opportunity to participate. However, two students had much more to say than the other four. They tended to take the lead. They were more willingly assertive and articulate than the others and were able to manage the direction of the session. There was no evidence of anyone feeling uncomfortable about this arrangement and no one appeared to be excluded from the debate. There demeanour, on the contrary, was inclusive No one gravitated towards the fringe.

A well structured knowledge base? One of the consequences of this innovation is that their prior experiences and expectations of assessment will be challenged. Their concern about the meaning of expressions in the criteria seemed to be evidence that they were attempting to relate the new conceptual scheme to their own. Following the session the group met and produced a short report with recommendations for modifications to the procedure.

The questionnaire

The self/peer questionnaire was administered a few week s after the assessment. Sixteen out of twenty two students responded. The following questions were asked:

The purpose

1 What do you think the purpose of the self and peer assessment was?
2 Was the purpose satisfied in this particular assessment? If so, why and how? If not, why not?

The process

3 Was the process of the assessment clear to you? If not why not?
4 How could the process be improved?

The experience

5 How did you feel about assessing yourself?
6 What were the difficulties in assessing yourself?
7 How did you feel about assessing your colleagues?
8 What were the difficulties in assessing your colleagues?
9 How did your experience of this assessment differ from your previous experiences of assessment?
10 Has the experience of this kind of assessment changed your approach to learning? What do you now do that is different?
11 If you were to be assessed in the same way for your next project would you approach your work differently? If so, what would you do that was different?

Below I have provided a selection of student responses to each question (the letter relates to each questionnaire);

1 What do you think the purpose of the self and peer assessment was?

b   By assessing each others work, it makes us look more closely at each piece and study the thought process behind it instead of judging work on initial impressions of the final piece. Having assessment criteria as a guideline to marking work allows us to become familiar with what examiners look for and what we should concentrate on when working on a project. Assessing college work is good practice for marking pupils' work in schools and develops our abilities to judge. The self assessment is an important par in developing techniques and processes, as we can study where we lost marks and correct that in our next project.

o   Self assessment helps you to become more analytical and critical of ones own development. Making judgements about your work creates a basis for future improvements not only of end products but also of working procedures which should lead to greater depth of knowledge and self satisfaction. Peer assessment is beneficial in becoming experienced in the whole process of assessment. Making impartial and objective judgements and then relaying these findings to peers requires skills in many areas ie communication, diplomacy critical awareness etc.

f   To show students exactly how marks are allocated so that they know why they are given their allocated grade. This then shows students exactly what their strong and weak points are and where they can improve.
The experience of self assessment also gives valuable experience which is useful for marking work in school.
It gives students a chance to look back over the term and concentrate upon their performance during it, students are 'forced' to consider how they've worked.

2 Was the purpose satisfied in this particular assessment? If so, why and how? If not, why not?

n   Yes, I was actively involved in the self and peer assessment through the decision making process ie discussion.
Yes, I think the experience has developed my skills in assessment. In particular my skills of analysis ie through examining the aesthetic qualities in a piece of work. In

addition my communication skills and ability to articulate ie through discussions with peers. Finally my skills of judgement, through practice at assessing a project "fairly", and in relation to that of others.

b   I think all the above purposes were fulfilled in the assessment and personally, I found it crucial to take a professional approach to the whole exercise, which means thinking about why we are doing this, what the criteria is looking at and most importantly putting aside personal opinions about the work or the artist. It is important to cover all angles of the work ie techniques, media, presentation etc and mark the elements separately as each may have a different weight on the overall mark.

j   I didn't feel it was an overall success because within each group you tended to get an 'average' mark, and between all the groups - those marks varied. Who's to say which group marked the work most accurately.

l   I am not sure that the purpose was satisfied in this particular assessment because I did not quite understand the assessment procedure, and each of us had different ideas about what the assessing meant.

3 Was the process of the assessment clear to you? If not why not?

a   I feel certain parts of the criteria lacked clarity of precision in some areas and even with a high degree of intellect a significant difference between each point couldn't be deciphered.
The underlying meaning of each point became confused and lost in several places. I therefore feel that a lack of clear justification within the assessment makes the marking of each individual difficult.

b   At first the process was confusing, particularly the media/material questions that I found hard to distinguish between, but after a while I found it fairly easy if time-consuming.

4 How could the process be improved?

c   It was felt, within our group, that it would be valuable to have an objective 'outsider' present to pose questions without leading the groups opinions but perhaps 'opening' them further. I think, also, that the number of persons in each assessment group needs to be carefully decided - six appeared to be too many as the views were often so diverse however, with only 3/4 people decisions could be lead by an 'influential' member.

k   ....and, surely, something which is the major piece of work of the whole course, deserves to be assessed by people who are qualified, practised and know what they are talking about ie Tutors external examiners, not students, who are, after all, still learning. Would the Government allow learner drivers to be tested by other learner drivers?

l   Making the marking criteria allot simpler to understand would hopefully improve the process.

5 How did you feel about assessing yourself?

b   I had no qualms about assessing my own work and I deliberately adopted the approach of marking what I saw as if it was not my own work. I found it easier to do this after I had closely studied other peer members work then gone back to mine.

e   I felt quite uncomfortable assessing myself as I don't feel, have the confidence to "blow my own trumpet" as it were, although the marks I generally give myself are usually spot on.

f   I quite enjoyed assessing myself. I found that I tended to work myself harder than the group marked me. I think that was something that we found happened quite frequently.

p   I found this quite difficult as I didn't want to mark myself too high, but also wanted to make sure I got a good mark due to the amount of effort I knew I put into my work.

6 What were the difficulties in assessing yourself?

b   It is difficult to be entirely honest in your mark and there is a temptation to mark in the extremes, usually marking yourself down to avoid embarrassment or disappointment when your peer group gives you a lower mark than you gave yourself. It is important to judge your work on what is presented rather than to think of all the hard work you have done and reward yourself for that.

d   It is difficult to step outside of your own work, as obviously you become very involved. You have sometimes to admit to your own lack of research etc.
You have to be constructively critical about your own work throughout to realise where you could have improved, for assessment.

f   Being honest

j   Making the marks appropriate to all the hours of hard work, and setting aside how hard I knew I had worked - to marking what I had actually achieved. But because I knew I had to do this anyway I tended to over compensate - when deciding what grade to give myself.

o   Being completely honest and distinguishing between the amount of effort I had put into it and the quality of that effort. ie In some areas I felt that I worked flat out and that might lead me to make a biased, subjective judgement.

7 How did you feel about assessing your colleagues?

b   As long as I kept my views and opinions totally professional and marked the work as if I didn't know the colleague, I felt it relatively easy. I feel that as long as I can justify my marks and give reasons for each mark, then I don't mind being totally honest and I don't feel embarrassed or awkward about discussing marks with the colleague.

e   I felt quite comfortable assessing colleagues as I knew I wasn't solely responsible for the grade given and there was several opinions of the work given. It also gave me more of an insight to their work which I normally wouldn't have been aware of.

f   It felt a bit awkward assessing the others because you build up a supportive relationship as you work through the term, then this changes and becomes critical.

g   I am more comfortable assessing others work than my own. Its also made easier by doing it in a group, especially when assessing a friend.

k   Worried about friendships, friction, confidences and personalities.
Not wanting to upset people, and possibly wanting to upset people. (professional eh? - but true).

p   Nobody really wants to give a peer a low mark, even if they think its what they deserve. Once or twice our group said "Go on give them a 3, we gave them a 4 last time." simply because we didn't feel we could mark them too low and offend.

8 What were the difficulties in assessing your colleagues?

c   It is often difficult to be completely honest and objective when assessing colleagues - especially when they are good friends! Again, this is where the stress lies, in trying to be diplomatic, in not offending or hurting people - how do you give a low mark, even when able to justify why, without 'flattening' someone?

o   Putting personal feelings aside. Giving a completely objective and impartial judgement. This proved extremely difficult on this occasion as the group had given each other support throughout the project. Having given support and guidance, and if peers had taken it, it was then hard not to feel some responsibility for it therefore even harder to admit failure in some cases.

9 How did your experience of this assessment differ from your previous experiences of assessment?

b   This assessment was much more in depth than any I had experienced. It was possible to argue your case or justify your marks given instead of just providing a final mark - no questions asked.

d   Previously assessment was by a tutor. This should have been more fair as tutors have no bias. Peer assessment can be coloured by individual likes and dislikes. However peer assessment can give more opportunity for justifying work - this should be in the diary anyway, but may not be read in depth.

h   We all took it more seriously as we knew what to expect, throughout the term we were taking assessment into consideration at out peer group meetings.

m   Previous experience of assessment has involved a tutor/teacher marking or grading work and justifying this by giving a short comment - this method of assessment involves the combination of many people's opinions - and clear reasons for the final grade.

n   This assessment offered active involvement, peer group discussion and an important role in the decision making process. Whereas my previous experiences of assessment failed to offer any of the above.

10 Has the experience of this kind of assessment changed your approach to learning? What do you now do that is different?

a   I now look at the criteria first to see what type of project will reap me the best marks. I would usually work the other way around but I no longer feel this is a beneficial way to work.

d   I am more self aware. It has made me take on other people's constructive criticism about my work more easily. I analyse work more, and ensure I am attaining the aims of the work/assessment.
The discussions with others can enable you to get an objective opinion on your work, and to give others wider thoughts about how they can work.

e   I think beforehand about some of the criteria needed when thinking of a project but when I think about it is this expressing myself or expressing myself within a given structured form.
I think my basic approach is different to what it was.

g   I feel a lot more relaxed about my work now.
For me the emphasis has switched from concentrating on a final piece to taking time to experiment more, take time to find a theme that interests me. I feel more comfortable with a series of pieces as long as I feel I am progressing and learning from it. I think this is due to my involvement in the assessment being able to discuss what I've done and why.
I feel my ideas, reasoning, effort and presentation are being assessed together not just what I pin up on the wall at the end of term.

h   Since experiencing this kind of assessment my reflective diary has improved, it has made me think more clearly about my aims - discussions with peer group members was also helpful.

j   Firstly I look at the way in which I'm going to be assessed - and then I think about which "statements" I need to meet, with my work - before I went with an idea and followed it's natural progression - now I try to satisfy the marking criteria.

l   Yes, this assessment has changed my approach to learning it has made me look a lot closer and deeper at people's work and it has guided me in what is needed in my own work. It also let me see that there is a lot more to assessing than I previously thought.

p   This form of assessment has brought more discussion into our work, which is beneficial, working on your own you never know if something looks 'right' to other people, and works as a piece of art.
Having the ideas of others to work with as well as your own is very useful.

11 If you were to be assessed in the same way for your next project would you approach your work differently? If so, what would you do that was different?

b   I think I would probably provide more evidence of my experiments instead of just talking about them or drawing sketches and plans in my journal.

c   Yes, and this, I feel, is the biggest downfall of the process. Having such a full/wide criteria for marking it seems that the obvious way of making sure each element of the criteria is fulfilled - to ensure a good mark - is to follow it rigorously. I feel that this would inhibit one's natural flow of creativity or influence ones choice of which lines/styles to follow and thus work would be produced only to fulfil criteria and would not be truly individual work - This is what I understood our 3rd year project to be about. I hope this assessment process won't cull individuality and originality.

e   I probably would as I know what's expected. I try and be more confident with my ideas and in group discussions contribute more and believe my opinions are as important as anyone else's.

I also know what analysing, not describing work in my diary is so I feel next time I can improve on that.

f   I would concentrate more on areas where my marks were lower.

g   Next term I want to apply the same made of working as last term. To explore different materials and exploit them as much as possible. Even if I'm told not to think of grades constantly. It's very difficult not to. In actual fact I have found that if I'm enjoying what I'm doing like last term I don't think of what mark I'll get. Is this solely down to the self/peer assessment? I don't know but I feel it has contributed.

j   I'd try to satisfy marking criteria, and then try to work upon my idea to that particular system.

l   Yes, I would change my approach to the next project. I would spend more time developing the process and noting every step I take. I will also look into more ideas before starting a project.

n   Yes, I would analyse what I was learning through the project, why I was learning it, and how the end product shows evidence that learning has taken place.

p   I changed my way of working last term due to the assessment style. Making sure I included each of the assessment requirements, so I get a good mark.
I do find it quite sad that our working should be changed simply to get a good grade, rather than because its how we want to do it.

From the selected responses above it is clear that some students found this form of assessment difficult. Some of the statements could well provide evidence of students taking a surface approach to the assessment. The issue of using the criteria to work out how to get the best marks is a worrying one in so far as those students have misconceived the role of the criteria in the process. The purpose of the criteria is to provide a guide within a domain for determining which SOLO level has been achieved. The question, nevertheless, remains as to whether the procedures should be even more clear, as some students suggest, or whether we should look a little more closely at those students who are having difficulties to see whether they are committed surface learners.

Also what is evident from the statements is that some students feel confident with the procedure and claim to have altered their approach to learning as a result.

Conclusion

Has using these two methods of information gathering helped me to determine whether involving students in the assessment of their own work and that of others promotes a deep approach to learning? The video was a recording of what turned out to be the most successful group. In permitting the students to formulate their own assessment groups it seems that, in several cases, friendships have determined the make up of the group. As this was a pilot study for the students themselves I agreed that the students should determine the group membership, This they did by picking names from a hat (literally). Despite the randomness of selection by this method some of the groups were constituted of well established friends. These friendship groups turned out to be either entirely motivated towards a deep approach or entirely motivated to wards (as one comment from the questionnaire suggests) the students' bar.

The video group was clearly the former. Those students who expressed concern in the questionnaire about assessing friends clearly did not recognise the importance of the

lifeskill of giving and receiving feedback with sensitivity. This exercise has confirmed to me that self/peer exercises if they are to be successful in promoting a deep approach to learning must be introduced at the beginning of a student's programme of study - before the basis of friendships is established. This is not to suggest that friendships should not be a part of the learning experience but that they should be recognised as a potential threat to objectivity in the context of assessment.

For it to be successful, students need to understand what counts as the difference between a deep and surface approach - simply telling them is not enough. Those students who took a surface approach to their project work also took a surface approach to their assessment and, in several instances, did not realise it.

The questionnaire was illuminating in many respects. It confirmed the friendship issue. It alerted me to the need to revise the assessment criteria in relation to the students' understanding of them, It has demonstrated that surface learners can happily convince themselves that they can continue to be surface learners by using the criteria strategically,

There were several comments made about feeling stressed at having to assess other students yet the process is intended to avoid the stress caused by other, less negotiable, forms of assessment.

What this evidence supports is the view that self/peer assessment as constructed in this project does support a deep approach to learning for those who recognise what counts as a deep approach. It does not seem to enable those who take a surface approach either to change their approach or, in some cases, to recognise that they are taking a surface approach.

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