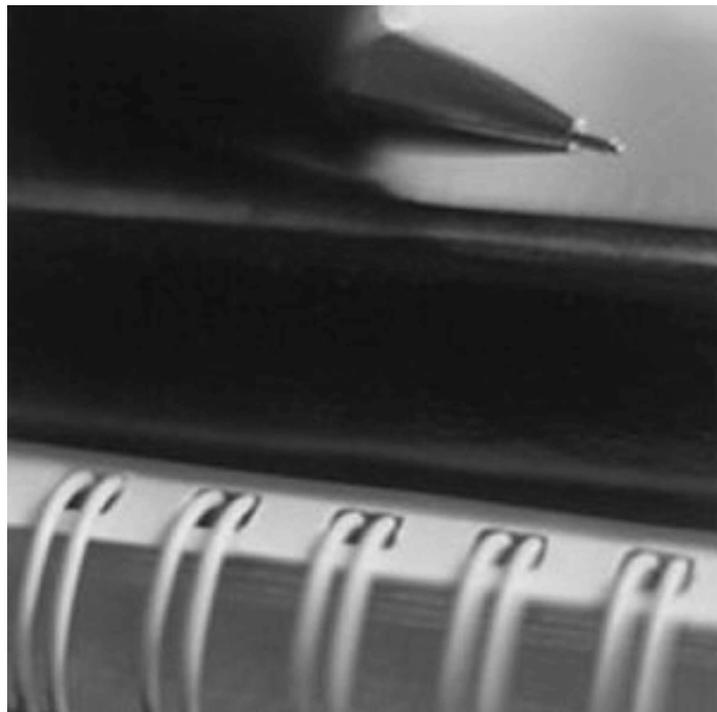# LEARNING AND TEACHING GUIDES

Engaging Sport Students in Assessment and Formative Feedback

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The Higher Education Academy — Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Network

Biographies

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Engaging Sport Students in Assessment and Formative Feedback

Sport as a discipline in higher education is grappling with the challenge of providing authentic and relevant assessment that engages students in their learning. The centrality of assessment to the student experience is now well accepted within the research literature (Brown and Knight, 1994; Rust, 2002). In particular, formative assessment, or assessment that creates feedback to support future teaching and learning experiences, can be a powerful tool for enhancing learning (see Black and Wiliam, 1998). Given that feedback is most effective if it is considered or reflected upon, one of the key challenges is to actively engage sport students in formative assessment processes. This guide offers advice in designing and facilitating sport students' involvement in assessment and enhancing their engagement with the feedback they receive. The aim is to support sport programme teams by taking a pragmatic approach, combining a clear academic rationale based on assessment for learning principles with case study examples of successful formative assessment exercises emphasising innovative approaches to giving feedback.

The guide consists of three key sections focused on:

1) Providing staff in HLST with background knowledge of formative assessment and formative feedback and how it relates to their subject.
2) Providing case study examples of how to effectively engage sport students with assessment feedback so that it *feeds-forward* to aid learning.
3) Providing a resource of references and sources of support for tutors wishing to further their learning in this area.

Section One: Assessment and Formative Feedback

Lecturers' knowledge of assessment is situated in the context of their own experience and in the particular traditions, expectations and needs of different academic disciplines (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007). In sport, these traditions cross disciplinary boundaries including science, management/ business, and sociological/philosophical approaches. Given the diversity of disciplines applied to the subject matter in sport, there is a heightened need to pay attention to how we induct students into assessment communities in Higher Education. The underlying concept is that learning is a social practice where subject disciplines are communities of practice (Pryor and Crossouard, 2007). Across the disciplines there is a need to make this learning process more transparent, as preparing a business report for a sport management module will have different requirements to writing a laboratory report for an exercise physiology module, and this will be different again to writing a reflective essay for a coaching and development module. Tutors across each discipline will develop their own implicit views of what good writing is and what it means to be academically literate. Each discipline has different conventions in terms of academic writing and methods of argument. Yet passing on such 'tacit' knowledge (Polanyi, 1998) is often difficult as it is in many ways attempting to tell what cannot be told. One way of unpacking tacit knowledge and navigating a way to understanding key concepts is by opening up assessment dialogue between tutors and students, and between students themselves. Recent research by Rust et al. (2003) suggests that reaching a shared understanding only emerges through discussion, and working with exemplars. It is often the dialogue surrounding the assessment briefs, the feedback on work and assessment criteria that assist students' understanding of the tacit knowledge of each discipline. A focus on assessment literacy in this way, emphasises the importance of the development of learning and as Broadfoot (2008) notes:

> *"We need to develop assessment procedures that are capable of addressing all the factors that contribute to learning and so can be used to help build up the individual's enthusiasm for learning and their capacity to do so"* (p214)

Sport programmes have much to gain in terms of adopting an assessment for learning approach across each discipline. Assessment for learning is formative and diagnostic which provides many opportunities to make transparent the building blocks for sport students to become academically literate members of their communities of practice In assessment for learning, the traditional divide between summative assessment, which focuses on judgement and grading of academic results, and formative assessment, focusing on providing feedback for future learning, is removed (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007). Indeed, Taras (2002) explains that:

> *"suffice to say that the current accepted theory no longer separates formative-summative assessment , and what is more, requires all assessment to be primarily formative in nature"* (p.504)

In assessment for learning, the emphasis is to encourage students' ability to take responsibility for evaluating, judging and improving their own performance by engaging them actively with formative feedback.

The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in Assessment for Learning (AfL) at Northumbria University, (http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_afl/whatis/?view=Standard), proposes six conditions for the support of AfL , which is developed through a learning environment that:

1. Emphasises authenticity and complexity in the content and methods of assessment rather than reproduction of knowledge and reductive measurement.
2. Uses high-stakes summative assessment rigorously but sparingly rather than as the main driver for learning.
3. Offers students extensive opportunities to engage in the kinds of tasks that develop and demonstrate their learning, thus building their confidence and capabilities before they are summatively assessed.
4. Is rich in feedback derived from formal mechanisms e.g. tutor comments on assignments, student self-review logs.
5. Is rich in informal feedback e.g. peer review of draft writing, collaborative project work, which provides students with a continuous flow of feedback on 'how they are doing'.
6. Develops students' abilities to direct their own learning, evaluate their own progress and attainments and support the learning of others.

Black and Wiliam (1998) provide clear research evidence that assessment for learning is the single most powerful tool for raising student achievement and go on to argue persuasively that formative assessment is at the heart of good teaching. Using Afl principles helps create a stimulating learning experience which encourages intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation which in turn builds learners' confidence and gives them a sense of ownership and control (Broadfoot, 2008). Motivation plays a key role in promoting learning whether this is on the playing field or in the lecture hall. Wiliam (2006) draws attention of the work of Csikszentmihaly's notion of flow:

"When the level of competence is high and the level of challenge is low, you get boredom, and when the level of competence is low, and the level of challenge is

> *high, you get alienation. But when the level of challenge is just at the limit of your competence you get this feeling of flow"* (p5)

Many sport students will be aware of Csikszentmihaly's notion of flow in relation to peak sport performance. In relation to achieving peak educational performance, the key is to create a stimulating learning environment that challenges students across a range of disciplines. This brings into focus the types of assessments that are used within sport programmes. Some types of assessment are more suited to AfL approaches, whilst others less well suited. For example, summative assessment focused solely on a traditional end of year exam offers little in terms of meeting the six conditions of AfL. In contrast, considering more innovative formative assessments which offers opportunities for feedback, often provides a stimulating learning environment. In this vein, Dochy and McDowell (1997) suggest that students gain more from alternative assessments methods such as portfolios, case studies or simulations and find such alternative assessments more intrinsically motivating. In sport, authentic assessments will differ according to specific discipline areas and may take forms such as research projects with sport organisations, oral presentations of sporting ideas, lesson plans, workshops, marketing plans or psychological athlete profiles. Such assessments are likely to be more relevant and also less threatening (Sambell, McDowell and Brown, 1997), than traditional exams or tests and the emotional impact of assessment on student learning should not be under estimated.

As well as considering the type of assessment used, a key facet of AfL is to consider how students will receive feedback on the assessment. Scholars such as Broadfoot (2008) and Taras (2002) indicate that feedback has more impact on learning than anything else. Black and William (1988) see student involvement in assessment, using feedback, participating in peer assessment, and self-monitoring of progress as moments in learning themselves. Students come to have a better understanding of their subject matter and their own learning through their close involvement with assessment. Moreover, students as key stakeholders in assessments judge assessment on the extent to which it can act as a source of feedback to aid their learning (McDowell and Sambell, 1999). Hounsell (2007) stresses that in higher education, well-crafted

feedback can enhance learning in three significant ways: by accelerating learning, by optimizing the quality of what is learned, and by raising individual and collective attainment.

So for sport students in higher education, assessment, learning and feedback are inextricably linked. One of the driving principles is that assessment that is rich in formative feedback helps to develop students' ability to evaluate their progress. Boud (2000) and Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) stress that engaging students with feedback helps to develop their learner self-assessment abilities. Rust et al. (2003) demonstrate that improving students' understanding of goals and standards enhances their achievement levels. The purposes of feedback are to motivate students, to inform then how well they have done and how to improve. As Brown (2001) indicates the improvements might be to the knowledge-base, understanding problem-solving strategies and writing skills. The majority of sport students will have a high level of awareness of the importance of feedback in guiding performance in terms of developing sporting excellence. How many sport students or sports lecturers have made the link to the importance of feedback to develop educational excellence?

For sport students drawing the analogy of how they go about improving their sport performance and how crucial feedback is in that process may help them see the relevance of feedback for their educational attainment. The following sporting example from Cross (1996) captures the need for feedback to enhance performance:

> *"Imagine, if you will, a group of people who are trying to learn archery in a darkened room where both the target and feedback on hitting it are invisible. The archers are provided with the best and most sophisticated equipment that money can buy; they have one-on-one coaching from an expert teacher who is demonstrating effectively how to hold the bow, get the right tension in the string and place the arrow, and they have access to good library materials on the dynamics of flight and the area of the trajectory. Despite all this quality education on the input side, it's pretty clear that they are not going to improve their performance until they get*

some feedback on whether they are hitting the target". (Cross, 1996: p.404)

Section Two: Providing Helpful Feedback

The importance of feedback is undisputed in pedagogic theory, however, Broadfoot (2008) points to a significant area of challenge in Higher Education as theory is not matched by practice. This mismatch is further substantiated by research evidence indicating that the majority of students in the UK do not understand the meaning of feedback they receive (Weeedon et al. ,2002, Weaver, 2006). Sport students themselves add to the debate as the National Student Survey results indicate their dissatisfaction in terms of their experiences of feedback. Recent research by Carless (2006) reveals student discontent with both the level of detail in the feedback provided, and with the contribution that feedback makes to helping improve their performance. Clearly, there is an immediate concern to restore the position of feedback as a pedagogic resource that is prized by staff and students alike and to safeguard the long-term sustainability of feedback in higher education (Hounsell, 2007, p103). There is a growing body of work that helps address the thorny issue of feedback. Rust (2002: p.153), drawing from a review of literature on the subject of effective and helpful feedback, and Broadfoot (2008) send clear messages that learning is likely to increase if lecturers provide feedback that is sufficient in detail and with sufficient timeliness to act on it; and if students are actively encouraged to self reflect and make use of peer assessment. In a seminal article on conditions under which assessment supports students' learning Gibbs and Simpson (2004-05) explicitly outline the following key aspects for feedback:

- Sufficient feedback is provided, both often enough, and in enough detail
- The feedback focuses on students' performance, on their learning and on actions under the students' control, rather than on the students themselves or their characteristics

- The feedback is timely in that it is received by students while it still matters to them and in time for them to pay attention to further learning or receive further assistance

- Feedback is appropriate to the purpose of the assignment and to its criteria for success

- Feedback is appropriate, in relations to students' understanding of what they are supposed to be doing

- Feedback is received and attended to

- Feedback is acted upon by the student

As Gibbs and Simpson (2004-05) note these conditions offer a framework for lecturers to review the effectiveness of their own assessment practice. In this instance, sport lecturers could use the framework as a tool to evaluate their own practices. Posing reflective questions such as to what extent are the students provided with feedback that has an impact on future student performance? If students seem to be repeating the same errors from Year 1 to Year 3 is there evidence to make some changes to assessment practices, particularly relating to feedback?

At this point it is timely to remember that the responsibility for providing feedback is not solely the remit of the lecturer. The remedy to assessment malaise is not simply more written comments on assignments or exam scripts. Formative feedback does not need to be all tutor directed, but can be provided using peer, co or self-assessment. Taras (2002) bemoans the fact that peer and self assessment are rarely used in Higher Education. She provides a persuasive argument based on the work of Sadler (1989) for a greater emphasis on student participation through peer and self-assessment. Providing opportunities for students to be able to develop the skills of self reflective is a key benefit of AfL approaches. A sporting analogy may help persuade sport students of the usefulness of developing their own skills of self- assessment -is Tiger Woods one of the world's best golfers due to listening to coaches point out errors, or being able to self-reflect and make the changes necessary to his game, or a combination of the two?.

There is much to be gained from designing seminars and tutorials that focus on assessment feedback. If feedback is viewed as information about the gap between actual and desired level of performance (Ramaprasad, 1983). Then the aim is to design activities which clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards) and help narrow the gap between actual and desired performance. Assessment activities need to deliver high quality feedback that enables students to monitor and self-reflect. The feedback needs to be embedded in day-to-day learning activities, as well as provided in response to formal assignments. Bloxham and Boyd (2007) capture the crux of providing effective feedback, by highlighting that the information must also relate to future performance, that is feed forward. Feed forward is a useful term as it focuses attention on that fact that guidance should ideally focus on what a student should pay attention to in future assessment tasks.

It makes sense to plan the focus of the feedback in terms of scaffolding the students understanding of their discipline and build this through a programme led strategy linked to programme learning outcomes. Students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement but this needs to be a co-ordinated strategy to address key skills across modules as well as develop subject and discipline based expertise. Orsmond's (2004) work on student self-assessment within communities of assessment practice is particularly influential in this area. It is clear that different subjects within sport offer different experiences in terms of student assessment practices. For example, modules in science based subjects may offer opportunities for peer assessment of laboratory work, whereas the 'softer' sciences may offer opportunities for peer assessment of participation in debates. Mapping out the assessment system across the curriculum is very informative as it points to gaps in coverage and potential duplication. The following table is adapted from Brown and Knight (1994) and uses selected examples to indicate how an assessment system can be mapped out for a sports development degree programme. Such a mapping exercise has the benefit of highlighting the type of feedback received by the student and capturing the variety of assessment modes:

Assessment Type	Level	Feedback Mode		
		Self	Peer	Tutor
MCQ Examination *Sport and Social Issues*	4	*		*
Laboratory report *Exercise science*	4		*	*
Media headlines portfolio *Sport and Social issues*	4	*	*	
Reflective log *Personal Skills Development*	4	*	*	*
Mind Map *Sport in the UK*	4		*	*
Action-research group project *Community Sports Development*	5	*	*	*
Work Placement portfolio *Sports Development Placement*	5	*		*
Lesson plans *Coaching Behaviours*	5	*		*
Video coaching session *Applied Coaching Practice*	6	*	*	*
Poster Sport on the Cultural Agenda	6		*	*
Awareness Reflective Portfolio Sport Equity	6	*		*

As Brown and Knight (1994, p132) indicate such an assessment grid can sharpen understanding of the place and purpose of individual modules within the scheme of things, thereby making it possible to arrive at a more coherent view of the programme. Such a mapping exercise also highlights how and where it is possible to expose the students to different assessments and feedback mechanisms which in turn will focus attention on how to progressively develop the students' ability to evaluate their own work. Developing such an integrated guidance and feedback loop (Hounsell et al., 2006) or feedback "spiral" (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007) highlights the dimension of progression through a programme. Such a feedback spiral is extremely effective when

linked to an academic literacies and threshold concept approach as demonstrated by the work of Meyer and Land (2003). So for example in sport science programmes how and where do students receive feedback on the concept of metabolism, for sport development programmes on the concept of equity, and for sport management the concept of relationship marketing? These concepts are used here for illustrative purposes but a fruitful discussion for programme teams is to explicitly define the threshold concepts for each programme and where in the curricula feedback is given on these concepts as almost a litmus test to how well the students grasp threshold concepts at each level of a programme.

Section 3: Case Studies

The following case studies outline innovative practices in the Division of Sport Sciences at Northumbria University across sport-related degree routes. The underpinning aim across the case studies is to create space for dialogue between students and tutors focused on assessment and feedback. Module tutors have made good use of technology in designing a variety of methods to provide detailed and timely feedback to sport students across modules within each programme. Tutors also place an emphasis on involving the students in the assessment process with a variety of tasks and exercises involving peer and self-assessment.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Engaging students through a Take Home Exam in Sport on the Cultural Agenda

Year 3/Level 6 students were asked to complete a mock exam based on set readings. The format mirrored the summative assessment and consisted of definitions of key concepts such as hegemony and discourse, a theoretical analysis of the photograph of Linford Christie draped in a Union Jack and a prepared presentation focusing on the relevance of social theory to sports development officers. Students selected if they wished to work in pairs or individually. The tutor set up a Blackboard eLP Discussion Board over a two week period and designed an assessment seminar to provide feedback on their exam answers. Question 1 was peer marked following discussions of the most informative definitions. Questions 2 was self-assessed from a model answer provided by the tutor. For Question 3, four groups were randomly selected to present to the class and received verbal feedback from the tutor and peers. In the assessment seminar, discussions focused on key concepts relating to the readings, clarifying the assessment criteria when marking the answers, a general discussion of how to integrate sporting examples with the theoretical material and outlining what makes a good presentation. The discussion board led to dialogue between both tutor and students and between the students themselves.

Troubleshooting:

Use of discussion boards requires good facilitation and engagement by the tutor, else students may not engage. Setting the tone of the discussion board, and trying to encourage those at the margins is particularly difficult – look for student 'buy in' beforehand, allow anonymous postings and set some ground rules for postings. In this module, the Blackboard eLP Discussion Board had 122 threads with some visited over 50 times - so it can work!

Case study 2: Engaging students using poster feedback in Sport Marketing

A poster is used as an assessment task in a Year 2/Level 5 Sport Marketing module, so that students engage with both content and the ability to market their ideas to a particular audience, creatively and effectively. The final posters are displayed in a seminar room and all students on the module are invited to walk around the posters, writing peer feedback comments in relation to specific marking criteria. Tutors also write feedback comments on the poster in relation to the same criteria. Students discussed the feedback comments from different students on their work and are encouraged to talk to each other and to the tutor about the criteria and what made for an effective poster. Students have the opportunity to compare their posters with others on display, so viewing examples which may be both better and worse that their own. Students come up with key criteria for an effective poster which may be used in a subsequent poster assessment.

Troubleshooting:

Engaging students in dialogue about the marking criteria prior to the poster session can help in directing students to ask appropriate questions. Wait for peers to give feedback before adding tutor comments. Try to make the atmosphere fairly informal and supportive to encourage discussion and lessen anxiety students may feel in having their work on display.

Case Study 3: Engaging students with formative feedback from presentations in Community Sports Development

This Year 2/Level 5 module was designed around an authentic assessment task, where the students worked together to complete and write up a piece of action research they undertook with a community sports development organisation. Students were asked to present, in groups, the proposal they had been developing for this research. Students were given an opportunity to practice presentation skills and seminar sessions had provided discussion sessions and ongoing feedback in the development of their ideas. Presentations were tutor marked and peers also wrote comments on the presentations using the same marking criteria. Peer comments were collated by the module staff and comments for all groups were returned to students in a lecture session. Students were then asked to theme the peer feedback comments (e.g. about depth of knowledge, content, or presentation skills) and compare these with tutor derived themes from the same comments to see how their interpretations matched those of staff. Students were asked to identify which comments they thought applied best to their group and to estimate their grade. Tutor marks and feedback sheets were provided subsequently, so that students could identify any perceptual gaps and ask questions. Students then identified what they needed to do to improve for their final submission.

Troubleshooting:

Students do not immediately find giving peer feedback an easy thing to do and initial comments can be very general. This can be used to discuss marking and feedback with students, so that their skills in giving feedback also improve. Whilst some groups are accurate in their self-assessments, for some groups, there can be a large gap between their own estimations and actual grades which needs to be carefully managed.

Case Study 4: Engaging students with intervention assessments in Psychological Skills Training

Students for a Year 3/Level 6 module in Psychological Skills Training are provided with psychological data about an athlete. Based upon their understanding of this data, students are asked to identify the area of weakness in the athlete (e.g. confidence) and to identify an appropriate intervention (e.g. imagery). The student assessment task is to design a mental training programme for the athlete. Students are given sessions introducing the interventions, relevant content and appropriate order of information needed. Practice case studies are discussed and students work in groups to flesh out their programme, gaining tutor and peer feedback. A case study is then posted to the VLE in the intervening week, for students to have a subsequent attempt at a more difficult case; students then present and discuss their answers in the subsequent session to gain further peer feedback and they note what is missing from a high quality intervention to prepare them for their final assignment submission.

Troubleshooting: Giving a practice case study for every key intervention i.e. goal-setting, relaxation, imagery and self talk can end up as over kill as students get bored and this can reduce their engagement with the tasks. Start from a more basic point and slowly progress them to where you want them to be for the assignment. In this way each task gives something more and is viewed as worthwhile. Students find the practice tasks on the virtual learning environment very valuable.

Case study 5: Engaging students through electronic quizzes in Sport Physiology

Physiological assessment in sport science in year 1/level 4 required laboratory practical skills which students sometimes find difficult. Videoing demonstrations of laboratory practicals and placing these on the e-learning portal, allows students to view and review their skills prior to coming to a laboratory session. Formative quizzes also placed on blackboard allow students to respond to questions that will help them fill in a lab workbook. Students gain immediate feedback from the task through prepared feedback comments which are triggered when a student response on the quiz is incorrect. Equally, praise is given for correct responses. Students can bring their answers and feedback to the next taught session to clarify their feedback .

Troubleshooting:

Setting up the quiz to provide the right kind of feedback is crucial if students are to be able to gauge their progress and engage with the task. Responses can take time to get right so that they encourage learning, so it is useful to discuss questions and responses within a programme team and to try the quiz yourself.   Ensuring that follow on sessions allow for discussion is also important so that students can see where they can take forward any queries. Multiple choice questions are easier to set up than longer questions, but it is useful to give feedback on each of the alternative choices.

Case study 6: Engaging students in self-assessment in Sport Subcultures

This Year 2/Level 5 module requires two research reports requiring data collection (observations) and a cultural analysis of a selected sport subculture. The first report is due in Week 7 and marked in a 2 week turnaround. In Week 9 the students participate in an assessment seminar where they receive their scripts with tutor's comments on the text. The students then read over the comments and have to write one page of feedback on their report, suggest action points for the next report and estimate their grade. Their own feedback is written on a standardised feedback form and specifically linked to the marking criteria for this module. On completion the student receives the tutor's feedback form and the actual mark and then engages in a dialogue with the tutor on the accuracy of their self-assessment and their vision of how to improve their work for the next assignment.

Troubleshooting:

The students are sometimes initially reluctant to engage in this quite difficult task. It is essential for the tutor to set out the rationale and outline the benefits in terms of future learning. The exercise is extremely beneficial in terms of clarifying marking criteria and opening up a discussion on the skills of editing one's own work. The tutor must also be sensitive to the emotional impact if students have not performed as well as they had hoped on the assignment. Focusing on how to improve performance and clarifying lessons learnt helps in this regard.

Case Study 7: Engaging students in reflective portfolios in Sport Coaching

A crucial element of Sport coaching is the ability to self-reflect. Year 2/Level 5 coaching students were asked to self-reflect on a video of their practical coaching for an authentic assessment task in the first semester. Tutor feedback was provided for this task. The second semester of the module continued to provide students with models of reflective practice. Students were subsequently asked to re-examine the video footage to delve further into the art of reflection in preparation for a subsequent assessment. Guided peer observation feedback and peer and tutor questioning were given on the videoed session, allowing students to work in pairs to consider the differences in their initial self-evaluation to their current evaluation, using the feedback and subsequent information about the models of reflection.

Troubleshooting

Students can find it hard to go beyond description in reflection. Giving examples of more critical and insightful reflections can help students identify ways of moving forward and being more able to objectively evaluate their own performance. Keeping questioning and feedback at an appropriate level is important and ensuring peers have a clear focus.

Case Study 8 : Engaging students in gaining immediate feedback in a Sport Science lecture

Towards the end of a Year 1/Level 4 sport module, the tutor asks students to identify areas they are unsure of in relation to the module content. In the subsequent lecture session, these aspects are turned into multiple choice questions and the lecture is presented as an interactive questioning session using the PRS (personal response system). Students are given handsets and asked to respond to multiple choice questions (based on the areas previously identified) which are embedded in a PowerPoint presentation. The students are able to gain immediate feedback as to their level of knowledge. The feedback from the PRS is displayed on the overhead screen in terms of percentage response to each question (similar to the audience participation in the 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' television programme). In this way, feedback is anonymous, yet individual students can tell if they are right or wrong. All students are encouraged to ask questions to clarify any misunderstanding (for example if they had selected an incorrect response but did not understand why it was not the correct answer).

Troubleshooting

Always check the PRS system is set up and working just before using it, and give clear instructions for use, as there is nothing worse than technology failing on you at the last moment! If technology is not available, try substituting different coloured cards that the students can hold up to indicate their answers.

Frequently Asked Questions About Designing Assessment Activities for Sport Students

1. **Do some assessment types enable more dialogue than others?**

As can be seen in the case studies, more innovative types of assessment such as reflective portfolios and take-home exams offer more room for manoeuvre in terms of designing activities that open up opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue about assessment and their learning. The case studies capture key features of formative assessment in terms of designing activities that enable learners to identify ways to move forward in relation to their own understandings of assessment standards. In this respect, another crucial element of the dialogue is for the tutors to have the opportunity to communicate clear and high expectations. As Taras (2002) notes, formative feedback necessitates a partnership in which the student has understood the purpose of the assessment, how it will be judged and how they can address their shortfalls in the future. Building in time to have such assessment dialogues and to build up a rapport and trust with students to enable two way communication about assessment is essential.

2. **Can spending time explaining assessment undermine student progression to independent learning?**

Activities are designed to clarify expectations in terms of the assessments. A useful method, if used sparingly, is to pose questions as well as answers in response to student queries about the assessment. This can be very effectively undertaken face-to-face in lectures or seminars, or can be conducted in online discussion boards where all students have the opportunity to pose questions and see the tutor's response (as well as revisit the discussion as many times as needed). Overall, such assessment dialogues need to be managed in such a way as to help students map out a way forward or confirm that they are on the right path. The aim is to gently challenge students to a greater understanding and deeper learning, rather than designing activities as a checklist to tell students what to do. Such tasks allow the students to develop reflective capacities and critical self-awareness which in turn develop their own agency.

3. **Does spending time on assessment not detract from the substantive content of the course?**

In all of the case studies above, the activities attend to both the learning process and substantive content for the module. The activities often focus on required readings and help the students work with the material in different ways. In terms of the amount of summative assessment, the findings of the case studies generally support the tenet of 'less is more'. An effective strategy adopted has been to require less summative

assessment but design more productive feedback sessions into the modules. In many cases the amount of summative assessment was reduced and replaced with formative assessment activities. Often tutors search for ways of assessing the process of completing the research as well as the product (i.e. the report) to capture more of the dynamics of the learning process. This supports Knight and Yorke's (2003) plea to use formative assessment to enhance learning rather than allowing summative assessment to drive the learning process. Moreover, a focus on assessment has not detracted from the content of the modules as the case studies reflect Jones' (2008) definition of formative assessment as "deliberately using a pedagogical relationship to enable learners to identify ways to move forward in relation to their own understandings of their world, to the standards of the workplace and the professional field of practice" (p1). This links into the earlier discussion about inducting students into communities of practice. Key advice here is for tutors to consider the threshold concepts for their discipline (see on-going work by Meyer and Land). Examples of these threshold concepts may metabolism in exercise physiology, discourse in sport sociology and social relationship marketing in sports management. The key is to map out how and where such threshold concepts are assessed across a programme and where the students have formative feedback on these.

4. **Will talking about assessment not just make students more anxious?**

The impact of feedback on student's learning is complex and involves issues such as sensitivity, emotional impact, trustworthiness and power relations. Fostering student engagement in assessment highlights the importance of the relationship between learners and educational staff. In designing activities it is also necessary to consider potential questions that may arise and how you will deal with student concerns. As facilitators of dialogue tutors benefit from using questioning and listening skills such as redirecting and paraphrasing for checking and developing questions to encourage the students to express their concerns. The tone of the dialogue is important in attempting to minimise the power dynamic and encourage the students to participate in the discussions. Reassurance and confidence building were outcomes from the dialogues and Boud (2000) indicates that fostering learner confidence will positively affect achievement. Many of the questions from the students that arose in the case studies could be categorised as seeking reassurance but also seeking ways forward to improve. Preparing students for assessment goes some way to reducing their anxiety and stress.

5. **Do you have any specific tips on how to provide effective feedback on student scripts?**

Rust (2002: p.153), drawing from a review of literature on the subject of effective and helpful feedback, suggests that effective written feedback should:

- Be prompt.
- Start off with a positive, encouraging comment.
- Include a brief summary of your view of the assignment.
- Relate specifically to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- Balance negative with positive comments.
- Turn all criticism into positive suggestions.
- Make general suggestions on how to go about the next assignment.
- Ask questions which encourage reflection about the work.
- Use informal, conversational language.
- Explain all your comments.
- Suggest follow-up work and references.
- Suggest specific ways to improve the assignment.
- Explain the mark or grade, and why it is not better (or worse!).
- Offer help with specific problems.
- Offer the opportunity to discuss the assignment, and comments.

Section 4: Further Information

Key Resources on Assessment and Formative Feedback in Higher Education

Black, P. and D. Wiliam (1998). Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment, Phi Delta Kappan, 80 (2), pp. 1-12
A much cited classic review of formative assessment and conclusion concerning the significance of feedback on learning. This provides an excellent theoretical rationale for assessment for learning approaches (see reference list).

Bloxham, S., and Boyd, P. (2007) *Developing Effective Assessment in Higher Education: A Practical Guide*
This is an excellent book that provides signposting to the most relevant research and comprehensive practical guidance on improving assessment in higher education.

Gibbs, G and Simpson, C (2004-5) Conditions Under Which Assessment Supports Students' Learning, *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, **Issue 1 (1), 3 - 31**
Their conclusion outlines a set of eleven 'conditions under which assessment supports learning'. This is recommended reading for anyone considering making changes to their assessment practice. It is written in accessible language and provides sound foundation for innovative approaches to learning (see reference list).

Hounsell , D. (2007) Chapter 8: Towards More Sustainable Feedback to Students, in *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education*, **Boud, D. And N. Falchikov (Eds), Routledge**
This is an excellent chapter highlighting the need for pedagogic practice to match theory

in higher education by developing morer sustainable feedback to students (see reference list).

Irons, A. (2007) *Enhancing Learning Through Formative Assessment Feedback,* **Taylor and Francis**
Provides a complimentary mix of relevant theories and principles combined with tools that will allow teachers to engage with students through formative activities.

http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/
This website is from Learning and Teaching Scotland, and includes resources, toolkits and information on assessment is for learning (AfiL) and how it relates to educational practice (mainly primary and secondary schools) in Scotland.

http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_4334.aspx
This website is from the qualifications and curriculum authority (QCA) and provides assessment for learning guidance, mainly for schoolteachers, but also for trainee teachers and researchers.

http://www.netskills.ac.uk/content/projects/jisc-academy-harnessing-assessment/part3.html
This website is from JISC Netskills and provides resources through a joint initiative from JISC and the Higher Education Academy. Examples range from MCQ creation tools through to peer assessment resources. The website invites you to 'Browse through the resources provided and try those that appeal'!

http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_afl/
This website is from Northumbria University Centre for Excellence in Assessment for Learning and provides and overview of Afl and links to resources.

Sport Specific Papers and Resources

Buswell, J., and Mathews, N (2004). Feedback on Feedback! Encouraging Students to Read Feedback: A University of Gloucestershire Case Study. *Journal of Hospitality, Sport, Leisure and Tourism Education* 3(1) pp 59 – 65. Available at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/hlst/documents/johlste/0063_buswell_vol3no1.pdf (accessed 16/12/08)

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http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/hlst/documents/johlste/0062_dale_vol3no1.pdf
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Dale, C., and McCarthy, P. (2006) I Like Your Style: The Learning Approaches of Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality Students Studying Generic Modules. *Journal of Hospitality, Sport, Leisure and Tourism Education* 5(2) pp 52 – 58. Available at
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http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/hlst/documents/johlste/vol7no2/PP0195Morton.pdf
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Spackman, L., and Casbon, C (2005) *Assessment for Learning in Physical Education.* Association for Physical Education.
This is a text mainly for embedding assessment for learning within teaching of physical education in schools. It has some useful lesson plans and is a practical guide.

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/hlst/resources/casestudies/assessment This website is from the Higher Education Academy HLST pages on case studies relating to assessment in sport, leisure, hospitality or tourism fields.

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