

The Legal Education Group is a discussion group, organised by the Centre for Legal Education but open to everyone (including, if your line manager says yes, subject administrators). It positively benefits from bringing together people from across the school. The autumn meeting focussed on:

“What I learned from ...” – sharing tips and techniques that we value and find useful but which we know we got from somewhere else. Whether that be peer review, observation of colleagues, a staff development session, talking to someone from another school, something a student said

Breaking things into small pieces

HT works with students struggling with skills by giving them small additional tasks that are: Specific, Achievable and Developmental. This might be a single bridging phrase (in oral presentation) that the student can go away and work on. It increases student confidence that they can improve and if the task is small enough, in the weakest student. JH recalls a family precept that “Everyone is good at something”.

HT also has students focus, when reading cases, by asking them to identify what the case means to them in 4-6 words (or fewer). A weaker student will give the facts, but a stronger student will give the tests. So it is possible to tell from the response the level the student is working at. The requirement for analysis means this is a big task disguised as a small task, but has a demystifying effect.

AN draws on material she found on the TES website for two activities designed to demystify and increase confidence:

- putting questions on whiteboards around the room and inviting students to go round and write up answers, comments and responses to other students’ comments. This addresses the fear of having to present results to the whole group and reinforces the idea that there is not always a single right answer.
- demystifying what is expected in essay answers, particularly in terms of argument, justifying assertions and critique. This is broken down into smaller tasks and built up from an initial seminar focused on reasoning, inviting students to peer review answers using the grade descriptors. Students become more confident in how to achieve higher grades than simply based on knowing the substantive material.

Student autonomy and interactivity

JC observed a colleague starting a session by making a list on a whiteboard of students’ own objectives for the session, then returning to it at the end to see if the objectives had been met. She has used this with LLB students to a) encourage prior preparation so the limited classroom time is used for troubleshooting rather than first principles, b) flush out things she didn’t realise the students didn’t realise. This led into a discussion about the extent to which students have sufficient self-awareness or confidence to articulate what it is they are struggling with. GF’s approach with third year students is to ask an open question at the end of a session giving students permission to/as a prompt to raise issues that could be worked on in subsequent sessions.

This also led into a discussion about generating a glossary to troubleshoot terminology (e.g. that “Act of Parliament” and “statute” mean the same things, but that “convention” might mean different things in different contexts/modules). There is a glossary in the LLR resources all students have access to, which AD welcomes contributions to, but some consensus that subject-level glossaries were useful too.

Software

As a result of the PGCHE, MH began to generate online assessments. He now uses design of MCQs and their answers to work out why students give the wrong answers and to give feedback on that basis: this is why answer a) is not the answer, but you might have been confused about X and this is a link to further reading/resources.

AD went to a presentation where Turning Point voting software was used (TurningPoint: <http://www.turningtechnologies.co.uk/>). Because she doesn’t see students on an ongoing basis, she uses voting as an icebreaker, promoting interaction and providing instantaneous results. MH also uses Socrative to get students to vote during lectures (<http://www.socrative.com/>) as it can be downloaded to their phones.

JC (after a conversation with an e-learning developer) and AD use Screencastomatic (<http://www.screencastomatic.com/>) or similar software to make short videos of interaction with documents or websites, quicker and more effective than text descriptions, particularly for students who are not on campus.

MH is trialling the use of augmented reality in a foundation of law module. It in essence involves augmenting the physical world by layering digital resources over pre-determined triggers. The digital content is 'revealed' using multi-platform applications on mobile devices.

Feedback

JC heard a conference paper by an academic at another institution who had realised not only that her students did not understand the phrases she used in her feedback, but that what she might mean by a particular phrase was not necessarily what other colleagues meant by the same phrase. So she and her colleagues had worked extensively on a feedback guide which explained, in some detail, what different phrases meant, and indicated that they would be used consistently by all markers. She also had a front sheet for in course assessment which required students to identify the prior feedback that they were acting on in each new piece of work.

This led to a discussion about understanding of feedback and acting on it as well as the question of consistency (e.g. "failure to use primary sources" could refer to different kinds of thing as a primary source in different subjects). AN uses peer review to identify two positives and one thing that could substantially improve the student work and sets acting on that point as preparation for the next seminar (which allows her to see if students have understood the feedback, as well as requiring students to act on the feedback received). We also talked about writing feedback (along the NITA/ Hampel axis) to identify action students, whether weaker or stronger could take to improve their work and the risk of students not reading feedback because they had read it as personal criticism rather than developmental.

Slightly miscellaneous

GF has learned from watching Michael Sandel's Harvard lectures (<http://www.justiceharvard.org/>) that it is feasible to engage interactively with individual students in lectures. It is hard work and the time the interaction takes reduces the amount of substantive material that can be covered, but it is very effective, particularly if there are co-lecturers who can take different positions.

Legal Education and Training Review

Following publication of the final report in June 2013 (<http://letr.org.uk/>), there has been a flurry of activity on the part of the regulators:

- The SRA "Training for Tomorrow" webpage, containing their response statement and other material: <http://www.sra.org.uk/sra/policy/training-for-tomorrow/resources/policy-statement.page>
- The BSB response: <https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/qualifying-as-a-barrister/letr-next-steps/>
- The Ilex Professional Standards response: http://www.cilex.org.uk/ips/ips_home/notice_board/ips_reponds_to_letr.aspx

and academics. So far, CLE staff have attended or participated in the following events: Westminster Policy Forum 8th October 2013; CILEX/IPS LETR summit 17th October 2013; Birmingham University CEPLER conference 2013 18th October 2013; ABA International Legal Education summit 19th October 2013 (which connected the LETR work to the ABA Task Force in the USA); SLS/IALS conference 30th October 2013, LERN conference 13th November 2013 and will participate in SRA *Training for Tomorrow* event 28th November 2013. Paula Moffatt also organised a joint NLS/Nottingham University student conference on *Your Future, Your Legal Career* on 13th November, which looked at the issues arising from the student perspective.

Dates for your diary:

- 1 NTU Annual Learning and Teaching Conference: https://www.ntu.ac.uk/apps/news/149201-41/Annual_Learning_and_Teaching_Conference_2014.aspx?source=headlinesnov13. Call for papers deadline 22 November 2013.
- 2 SRA *Training for Tomorrow Roadshow*: 28th November 2013 (Hooley Room, NTU conference centre). <https://forms.sra.org.uk/s3/t4t>
- 3 ALT Conference, *Responding to Change*, 13-15 April 2014: <http://www.lawteacher.ac.uk/events>. Call for papers deadline 6 December 2013.
- 4 Centre for Legal Education research retreat: 9-10 December 2013.
- 5 BERA call for papers, *Researching inequalities in Higher Education*: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/events/researching-higher-education-investigating-inequalities>. Deadline 31 January 2014.
- 6 Centre for Legal Education Conference, *The Value of Legal Education*. 7-8 February 2014. http://www.ntu.ac.uk/apps/events/15/home.aspx/event/149178/default/centre_for_legal_education_conference_2014. Call for papers deadline: 16 December 2013.
- 7 Centre for Advocacy, international advocacy teaching conference, 27-28 June 2014.