

The fourth meeting of the Nottingham Law School Legal Education Group was held on Monday 8th June 2009. The LEG, led by Becky Huxley-Binns and Jane Ching, engages in research in legal education and as a result aims to raise the profile, internally and externally, of the teaching quality within Nottingham Law School. This meeting, led by Joy Davies, discussed a number of challenges relating to assessment.

For example (Brown, 1997):

- What kinds of things do we want our students to learn?
- What opportunities are provided?
- What assessment tasks are set?
- What methods of assessment are used?
- Are they worthwhile?
- How much time is spent by students on assessment tasks?
- How much time is spent on setting, marking and managing assessment?

Undergraduates are now recruiting private tutors to help them through their degrees. There are more international students (and international tutors). As discussed at meeting 3, we often have the situation of a marker with X years' experience in the field marking the work of students with X months (or even less) experience. Undergraduates, however, are now more able to calculate what they need to get in their final exams so as to achieve the coveted 2:1. The recession will only enhance this strategy.

When we summatively assess we (normally) assess as of one time and place. We don't consider letting students retake infinitely (as with the driving test) or only when they are ready. Do we want people to learn to think or to learn to pass exams? Assessment may quite feasibly inhibit learning.

Programme learning outcomes

Where there are programme learning outcomes and, separately, module learning outcomes, the module learning outcomes should "nest beneath" the programme learning outcomes. But do we assess the module learning outcomes or the programme learning outcomes? Is there a risk that focus on assessment of module learning outcomes means that critical programme learning outcomes could escape assessment? Should we be assessing "graduateness" (and "postgraduateness") if these are different?

Levels and what we are assessing

Joy compared the SOLO Taxonomy – based on research on student learning (Biggs & Collis, 1982 as referred to in Biggs, 2007), and the verbs included in it to demonstrate different levels of achievement and compared these with verbs seen in material derived from Bloom's taxonomy (Biggs, 2007). How rigorous can verbs be in determining an objective level? Of the list in Bloom's taxonomy, "understanding" is the only level that is internal within the student (and can therefore only be assessed through the others, such as "application" or "analysis"). One could also assess understanding by having students teach what they had learned, acquiring transferable skills but this has resourcing implications.

Does our awareness of the students' context mean that we are inadvertently moving the goalposts as to the level we expect, particularly at M level when there is no progression? Do tutors understand what the various descriptors mean and what they are looking for?

References:

Biggs J., Tang C., (2007) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University. What the student does. 3rd Edition*: Maidenhead and New York: SRHE & OUP: McGraw Hill

Bloxham S., Boyd P., (2007) *Developing Effective Assessment in Higher Education: a practical guide*: Maidenhead & New York: OUP McGraw Hill

Boud D., Falchikov N., (eds.) (2007) *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education. Learning for the longer term*: London & New York: Routledge

Brown G., Bull J., Pendlebury M., (1997) *Assessing Student Learning in Higher Education*: London & New York: Routledge

Moon J., (2002) *The Module & Programme Development Handbook. A practical guide to linking level, learning outcomes & assessment*. London: Kogan Page

Would you like to join us? The LEG is open to **all** academics in all 3 divisions of the Law School, and you do not have to be interested in publishing in legal education. If you are interested in what we teach, why we teach it and how, you are more than welcome to join us, either for a single session or at every meeting. The next meeting will be scheduled for academic year 2009/2010 and work is ongoing to find dates that are accessible to **everyone**.

Dates for your diaries.

1. NTU inductions for new academic staff and researchers start soon
2. International Conference on Professional Doctorates is on 9th/10th November 2009 in London
3. LILAC10 is on 29th/30th January 2010 at Warwick

NB You might wish to refer LLB or GDL students to the winning student essay at

<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/interact/essay.html>