

Case Study Title: The importance of flexible assessments in today's diverse learning environments as part of the course 'Teaching Creative and Critical Thinking SCQF Level 10' (TCCT)

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Institution: Edinburgh College

Subject area: Teaching and Learning

Programme/Course: Teaching Creative and Critical Thinking

Module/Unit: All

SCQF Level: 10

Assessment Name: Flexible assessment

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1. How would you summarise your practice case study?

The learners are all working educators from Primary, secondary, tertiary as well as community educators and the main aim of the qualification is supporting them to identify, foster and measure both creative and critical thinking in today's learning environment and give their learners the opportunity to solve open-ended, real-life problems which will provide them with explicit and structured experience working in the space of uncertainty.

The qualification will also ask the candidates to:

Explore how teachers can address the mismatch between the demands on teachers to meet everyone's needs and how individuals learn. Quite often the measuring stick for successful academic learning has led to assumptions about learning difficulties in our learners, so teachers need to change their perspectives on how to meet the needs of those people who learn differently and to be assessed differently. To do this we need to evaluate and implement approaches to optimise the learning progress by introducing flexible, creative and critical thinking pedagogies/andragogy into the learning environment.

Not all learning takes place in a classroom environment and again skills will be needed for teachers to be able to plan, deliver and assess in increasingly creative ways while still being able to meet the robust requirements of academic learning.

2. Why did you develop or enhance your assessment and what was your rationale?

As well as being able to deliver subject matter and skills, teachers have an important third role: cultivating creative and critical thinking capabilities. This qualification was designed to look at designing, developing and delivering a flexible pedagogical assessment approach that enables deep thinking skills including creative and critical thinking, metacognition and ethical reasoning, both for the educators attending the TCCT course but also in helping their own learners to deeply understand and apply the curriculum – and prepare them for a lifetime of learning using the skills acquired.

3. What enhancements or changes did you implement in assessment in making this more innovative, diverse or inclusive of diverse learner cohorts?

We changed from traditional assessment practices such as assignment writing to show and understanding of theoretical knowledge, to a much more dialogical approach with knowledge and understanding being evidenced in the dialogue between learners and led by the lecturer. Activities relating to teaching were set and learners demonstrated these in sessions gaining feedback from peers. Peer and self-assessment were used to demonstrate learner understanding, interpretation and application needed to be a creative and critical thinker in the chosen subject. Along with the need for more creative teaching and learning comes the need for more flexible and creative methods of assessment. We explored how and why we need to adapt new methods of both formative and summative assessment to fit in with the flexible pedagogies/andragogy used, while still meeting the principles of assessment: Fair, Equitable, Valid, Authentic, Reliable, Current, and Sufficient (FEVARCS).

4. What informed your approach to the changes you made, e.g. student feedback, observations of student difficulty, insights from literature or research findings, assessment pass rates etc.?

We had recognised for some time that traditional assessment approaches were no longer effective for the ever-increasing diversity of our learners and their learning capability. A year of research both secondary (journals, academic books) and primary (colleagues, curriculum groups, community learning programmes, all school sectors, classroom observations, discussions with practitioners etc.) all highlighted the same issues such as the diversity of students not only in learning needs but in mental health issues and special assessment requirements. There were issues around students simply dropping out as soon as assessments were handed out or that they simply struggled too much with the content of the assessment. Both learners and educators complained about assessment

overload. Mental health issues caused some students to fear assessment so much they simply left their intended course. All of these issues needed to be addressed so educators could be enabled to design and approach assessment in different ways giving their own learners the choice of how they might produce and present their evidence for assessment. So, all of these factors were referred to when designing the qualification. We then applied different assessment approaches, which can also be used cross contextually and which support and inform future learning, while still meeting the principles of assessment (fairness and equitability, validity, authenticity, reliability, currency and sufficiency of evidence).

The creative and critical process has been applied to construct a stepped-out approach for learners. Practice includes metacognitive question prompts, the promotion of risk taking, the 4 Cs (Critical thinking, Collaboration, Creativity, Communication) the use of feedback tools such as 'Plus Delta', 'Plussing', 'Stop-Start-Continue' and 'Game Storming' to provide cyclical learning through positive additions. This in turn supported the core habits, help learners in developing resilience and tenacity and also form part of the formative assessment process.

5. What key changes have you seen because of this change to your assessment practice?

More engaged learners within the college/school/community, better retention on the courses where educators had undertaken the TCCT qualification. We also found that the educators undertaking TCCT were much more willing to take risks to try new methods of both delivery of learning and assessment methods

6. How are you evaluating the effectiveness of these enhancements or changes implemented?

At the moment gathering data from attendees of the course with input from educational sectors delivering the Creative and Critical Thinking courses SCQF levels 1 -7. We estimate we will have enough data after 5 years of delivery to be able to extract valuable information.

7. Tips for practitioners:

Do you have any tips for practitioners wanting to make similar enhancements or changes in their assessments that you could add in?

I think just persisting and being brave. Let learners recognise there is still valuable learning in part or complete failure. Seek out other like-minded practitioners and work collaboratively with them to share best practice and reliable resources.