

**Case Study Title:**

Leading Otherwise: An Affirmative Approach to Assessment

**Your Name:** Dr Kay Sidebottom

**Institution:** University of Stirling

**Subject area:** Education

**Programme/Course:** MSc Education

**Module/Unit:** Educational Leadership

**SCQF Level:** 11

**Assessment Name:** Leadership Portfolio

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**1. How would you summarise your practice case study?**

This case study explored the evolution of a Leadership module assignment exercise, demonstrating how we moved from a traditional essay format to connect with module aims of social justice, decoloniality and reflexivity through a practical and creative assessment approach.

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

The MSc Education is a critical, socially justice-oriented programme which aims to be contemporary and innovative in its approach. During the course development, module leaders have been transforming assessment diets across the programme in order to reflect these aims. Further to this, Educational Leadership scholarship is often based on Western, Eurocentric and humanist ideals which do not reflect the lived realities of the largely international MSc student cohort. Writing about leadership is often grounded in neurotypicality and other ableist/normative modes of humanity. As a result, I developed the following questions to guide thinking around assessment redesign:

- How can we disrupt Western leadership paradigms and ableist norms around leadership through assessment? How can we sensitively handle attachments to heroic leadership models while considering non-linear and horizontal alternatives?
- How might we encourage a shift from reflective (individualising, representational) to diffractive (creative, affective, communal) thinking?

- How can we effectively reflect the aims and ethics of the module in assessment practices?

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

Assessment was changed from a traditional 3000 word essay to a portfolio-based task. Students designed their own Google site, which they were able to keep and refine or share (for employment, professional development or other purposes) after the module had concluded. The assessed element of the portfolio required students to create a reflexive journal in which they could reflect on leadership theory and practice either in a typical diary format or through story-telling, allegory, fairy tale, dialogue or any other narrative mode which suited them. The second component was a digital artefact. Students created a podcast, infographic, web page or any other digitally-mediated piece which told the story of a specific leadership experience or practice. To accompany this, they produced a short critical analysis which connected theory to their work.

This approach allowed students to be creative in ways which suited their own learning preferences, skills and interests as well as reflecting their own cultural traditions and beliefs.

**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.?**

Experience on teaching Educational Leadership has revealed a disconnect between what students write about leadership, and how they view themselves as leaders. This module aims to develop confidence and move away from heroic models that position 'leaders' as somehow different from the rest of us. As such, allowing the creation of personalised reflections and artefacts enabled students to think more deeply about their own relationships to, and resistances to leadership 'as-usual.'

**5. What key changes have you seen as a result of this change to your assessment practice?**

There has been a significant impact on engagement in the module. Students are enthusiastic about the portfolio task and particularly enjoy the creation and design of their own platform. Students have been exceptionally creative in their interpretation of the module assessment, producing professional podcasts, films, short stories, and interviewing AI chatbots amongst other things. Importantly, their reflexive journals have revealed a shift in their own understandings of what it means to be a leader.

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

Evaluation is carried out using standard university module processes and also through ongoing dialogue in class.

**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 would recommend that practitioners think carefully about creating alignment with the modules aims and the assessment tasks created. For example, if a module aims to introduce decolonial thinking, or to introduce different ways of understanding what it means to be human, assessment should reflect these aims.