How forums and webinars can engage and support distance students in a dissertation module.

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Context – 2012:

• David stumbled across a ‘Peer Review’ pedagogy
  • View & review
  • Share
• Community of ...
  • Practice (Wenger, 1991), &/or
  • Inquiry (Garrison, 2003)
• High student engagement
  • Active learning approach (Revans, 1983)
• Technology affords amplification
  • Webinar
  • Discussion board
Contemporary context:

• 2016 Toni:
  • 18 students that required dissertation supervision
  • double previous cohorts

• Looking for
  • equitable experience for distance students
  • Addressing issues of time and geography
This presentation

• Describes David and Toni’s approaches
  • Benefits / issues / implications
  • Looking for similarities and differences
• Discuss issues with Toni, David & colleagues in the room:
  • Could this approach transfer to your students?
Define ‘Peer Review’

“… an arrangement whereby students evaluate and make judgements about the work of their peers and construct a written feedback commentary.”

Nicol et. al., 2013
“… both the production and the receipt of feedback reviews can enhance students learning without necessarily increasing teacher workload.”

Nicol et al, 2013
The aim of peer review?

• Increase effective feedback
• ... whilst maintaining / reducing tutor workload.
The effects of peer review*

• Encourages a constructive approach / pedagogy;
• Timely feedback, from multiple perspectives, in ‘student language’;
  • & be able to incorporate into CURRENT work;
• Reinforce the learning outcomes
  • in their contexts;
• Increase student ability to self-assess;

• However
• Needs to be ‘well guided’

* formative
David’s Cohort:

• Student profile
  • 60 students
  • 3rd year education
  • Wider school workforce
  • Very strong cohort with high achievers.

• Their drivers:
  • Qualification
  • Recognition
  • Money (PGCE courses)
Toni's

• Student profile
  • 22 students; 3rd year 'top up'; new to EHU; this cohort weakest group since 2009 – many with learning support needs;

• Course profile:
  • Once a week attendance – rest 'blended' - with 6 'distant'.

• Their drivers:
  • 1/3 going to PG (PGCE or Schools Direct/ social work / nursing)
  • Many saw 3rd year as required for 'full degree';
  • Some regarded a Hons degree as 'Personal achievement'
  • 2/3 wanted to excel

• Toni's driver for using peer review: Number of students; 8 week timescale.
David – what I did …

- Went to first face-to-face
- Created discussion board
- Create welcome video
  - Subscribe
  - Voluntary
- Sent announcement
David – what I did next...

- Discussion board: Posted model responses;
  - Links to resources
- Acknowledge contributions
  - ‘With thanks to Alice, Bernard and Cath…
- Thanking key contributors privately
  - … don’t want to see ‘Alice’ all the time...
- Prioritising discussion board feedback
  - At expense of emails
- When to jump in?
  - Follow Salmon model
Then engaged with the tools:

• Use the Notification tool:
  • Thanks to those ...
  • Invite others ...
  • Email the reluctant;
  • Phone the elusive;
  • Mobile the avoiders;
  • Home phone for the disengaged;
• If I saw ‘questionable’ practice:
  • Drown it out
• Share tutorial guidance:
  • Students invited to post summary.
David’s Research Methods

By the end of this short tutorial you will be able to:

- Explain the concepts of reliability, validity, and generalisability
- Explain the key characteristics of three research methods widely used in educational research:
  - Interviews
  - Observation
  - Questionnaires
- Decide whether these are appropriate for your study.
- Know where to get further information about Research Methods.
Outcome?

• ... outstanding results:
  • (but it was a strong cohort)
  • tinyurl.com/57firsts

• Concerns about collusion
  • Melted away

• I was also undermarking
  • Left moderation with 5 more Firsts!

• Concerns about ‘stealing’ students:
  • “... vanished [at graduation] as fathers, husbands and daughters came up to me and thanked me (rather enthusiastically) for the support, help and encouragement that I had given their loved ones”
Toni's story

• 15-16: Academic Facebook:
  • Previous year student rep created Facebook Group Messenger
  • Toni invited to participate – purely for academic purpose
    • Instant feedback
Toni's story, 16-17:

- Sep '16: Student rep created current Academic Facebook
  - Used for module advice, assessment advice – academic focus
Larger cohort?

- Oct '16 - Toni looking to use Collaborate
  - so conversation with David
  - Led to online tutorials
  - 1-2-1 use of Collaborate -
  - Dissertation (LR, no research) is 4th assessment point – 8 week timescale

Led to ...

- Toni looking at David’s blog – saw the discussion board as mechanism to support student, & since ...
  - Create discussion boards for:
    - General; Literature searching; Literature review; Conclusions & recommendations; Introduction & Rationale.
What happened

• All engaged – read others postings
• Half posted their work to the discussion board
• Quarter commented on peers work.
Technology amplified Toni's voice

• 1-2-many vs 1-2-1
• Signposting
  • Toni
  • Students
  • Sometimes from Facebook
Outcome

• All passed
Student experience:

• Informal focus group
• Between courses
Student experience:

• Motivating
  • “Helping each other”
  • “Instant help”
  • “Know where others in the group are”
  • “Makes you feel anxious if someone is ahead”

• Technology
  • Collaborate: “Loved it”, “Seeing faces”, “tutor input [more timely]”
    But:
    • “... didn’t want to interrupt...”
    • “... would rather see stuff written down...”

  • Discussion: “Everything organised”

• Issues:
  • “Scrolling back” [through Facebook]
  • “First time took ages finding way around”
Student’s advice to new students:

• “Start early – take full advantage:
  • Academic Facebook
  • Blackboard discussion
  • Collaborate”

• “Attend critical analysis sessions in library”

• “Drafts [posted] … someone else looking for different point of view – asking to elaborate – give you motivation / peer support”
Similarities ...

• Outstanding results
• Student engagement
• Builds community / skills for life
Differences

• David’s group were more critical
  • ... longer timescale?

• Toni’s group demanded more attention
  • ... due to a shorter timescale?
What's unique about this process

• One member of staff able to supervise large cohort (22 / 60)
• Student led / focused (Ghost in the wings)
• Build a Community of Practice / Inquiry
  • Builds ‘digital skills’ for life.
Seven barriers

- A lack of confidence:
  - in their own work
  - in commenting on peers’ work;
- Not happy with others commenting on their work;
- Poor quality feedback
  - Perhaps due to reluctance to offer areas for improvement?
- ‘… lack of confidence in assessors and/or assessments …’
- 47% of students found student peer assessment ‘… not useful.
- Concerned about others using their work
- Evidence that instructor intervention is required to reap significant learning gains (Zingaro & Porter, 2014);
Implications for practice

• Advising a digital literate colleague taking next year's module:
  • Start Facebook / Discussion etc at start of course.
  • Academic Facebook (consider alternative)
  • Discussion boards (Tutor to engage lots, then less)
  • Collaborate (Limit tutor webinar availability – perhaps 2 sessions a week, or 1 scheduled 1 ad-hoc)
  • Set ground rules – manage expectations
    • tutors response will be slower than peers
Benefit of approach:

• Student engagement
• Higher success rate
• Easy to monitor
One issue:

- Consider alternative to Facebook Group
  - Messenger
  - WhatsApp
  - University system?
Advice to management

• Effective way of getting more for less
  • Increase student outcome
  • Close qualitative monitoring of student performance
• More engagement = Increase student happiness
• Developing peer review skills: Info skills for life
• Fits well with 'digital world'
Facebook issue?

• Thought experiment:

“How would students be using Facebook if we hadn’t used it for academic purposes?”
Unanticipated outcome:

• Facebook Alumni group
Discussion / questions
Take away messages

• What will you be using with your students this / next year?
All references are on:

http://dbcallaghan.blogspot.co.uk/2010/02/current-reference-list.html
Appendices:
A lack of confidence in their own work:

- Create private journals
- Private email / phone calls
Lack of confidence in commenting:

- Model the type of feedback you see as useful
- Comment on others feedback
- Give guidance about feedback (writing frame?)
  - Suggest students ASK for a focus for feedback
- Persuade them their voice is valued
- Private email / phone calls
Not happy with others commenting:

- Persuade that all opinion is valid;
- Encourage welcoming peer feedback
Poor quality feedback
( reluctance to offer areas for improvement )

• Model feedback / exemplars
• Lead by example
• Feedback writing frames
Lack of confidence in peers comments:

- Persuade all opinion is valuable
  - Even when wrong, it makes you think;
  - Encourage students to be circumspect about all feedback
Concerned about others using their work:

• Post first!
• Encourage the idea of once an idea is given away, two better ones come along.
A final ‘Barrier’:

- 47% of students found student peer assessment ‘… not useful."
- Therefore …