An introductory guide to nine case studies in peer and self-assessment.

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Introduction

This document is a preface to nine case studies in peer and/or self-assessment developed by the author in collaboration with several academic colleagues at Griffith University. There are three key purposes for this document.

First, although each case study is unique, a common template was used to provide some consistency of structure. It is likely that readers will find it simpler to find particular details of interest once that structure is explained. Accordingly, a description is provided below.

Second, the nine case studies sought to cover application of peer and self-assessment in as broad a range of contexts as reasonably possible. These include: a broad range of disciplines; courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate level (including applications in first-year undergraduate courses); small and large classes; applications limited to only one course and one which permeates an entire program; one case where a blended learning approach is used and, applications where teaching is confined to ‘on-campus’ and one where the program is facilitated in ‘distance mode’. For readers seeking details of peer and self-assessment practice within particular contexts, these are mapped to the case studies and presented in a summary table as a guide.

Third, a brief synopsis and comment is provided for each case study to assist in identifying practices which may appeal to readers who may then find full details in the associated case.

Structure of the case studies

Each case study relates to peer and self-assessment implemented at the course level (where courses together comprise programs). The structure of each case study is as follows.
Context: The rationale, aims and objectives for the course, together with some descriptive information are presented in order for readers to appreciate the educational purposes to which the peer and self-assessment practices relate, and the context within which they are applied.

Assessment: In all these case studies, peer and self-assessment practices are used alongside other assessment methods. This section details all the assessment practices used so that readers can appreciate the size and scope of the peer and self-assessment practices in each case. Only the peer and self-assessment practices are detailed in full.

Teaching and learning strategy: The general view adopted in these case studies is that the use of peer and self-assessment is an integral part of a teaching and learning strategy. In practice, the extent of this integration varies. This means that it is sometimes so intimately integrated that it is the primary driving force in that strategy (See for example: Nulty & Freakley - Education, and Nulty & Denson – Jazz). In these cases it becomes difficult to separate the strategy from the assessment practices. For this reason, while most cases present the assessment section followed by the teaching and learning strategy others do the reverse. In all cases a deliberate effort has been made to clearly identify details of the peer and self-assessment practice and to identify the strategy served by that practice.

Evidence of effectiveness and impact: This section summarises available evidence that the peer and self-assessment practice reported has had a demonstrably positive impact on student learning outcomes and/or the quality of their learning experience. In practice, the evidence presented in these sections is generally limited. There are several reasons. First, for example, the peer and self-assessment practices are always sub-components of a larger picture. It follows that the educative effect of these sub-components is difficult to isolate. Indeed, peer and self-assessment usually interacts with other sub-components deliberately and symbiotically. Second, the use of peer and self-assessment is not generally implemented in an overtly experimental way. This means that associated steps for formal evaluation are usually not included. Finally, educational evaluation is difficult at the best of times. Despite these limitations, sufficient evidence is generally available to support the view that these courses yield good educational outcomes for students, and that it is the use of peer and self-assessment in particular which takes a large portion of the credit for this. In this regard, this argument is supported not only by direct evidence relating to outcomes and experience, but also indirectly through the reasoning which links the use of peer and self-assessment to an educational strategy (the preceding section). In other words, in general terms: the cases seek to demonstrate a theoretically sound basis for implementing the practice of peer and self-assessment first, then they proceed to demonstrate (so far as possible) good student outcomes, and finally contend that the two are related.

Principles of good practice illustrated by the case: In this section some of the principles of good practice which are identified by research literature are briefly described insofar as they are illustrated by the peer and self-assessment practices detailed in the particular case. The purpose of this section is partly to help enhance readers awareness of these generic principles of good practice in curriculum design, and partly to illustrate how peer and self-assessment practices can address them.
This section should be read in conjunction with the discussion provided in a separate document prepared by the author ("Evaluating of the application of peer and self-assessment to seven good practice principles in higher education.") which relates Chickering and Gamson's "Seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education" (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, 1991, 1999; Gamson, 1991) to peer and self-assessment generically.

How to do it yourself: As its title suggests, this section aims to focus on specific details of each case which are thought critical to its successful implementation by others. It is not intended as a step-by-step guide, because any implementation of the practice in another course needs to adapt the practice to that local context. Thus, this section helps readers to focus on those aspects of the practice which are considered essential.

Teaching materials: Often the academics who have developed the use of peer and self-assessment have also developed materials to support them and/or their students in using these practices. Examples of these materials have been included as appendices to the cases. Again, this is intended to be illustrative. Use of the materials "as is" is not recommended. Adaptation and adjustment for your own context is required.

Range of case studies

The principle author of all nine case studies is Duncan D. Nulty. However, none of these would have been written without the scholarship, professionalism and generosity of the co-authors who were the pioneers in respect of actual implementation of peer and self-assessment practices described. Their contribution is very gratefully acknowledged.

The table below provides as summary of the range of different contexts covered by the different case studies on five principle variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Co-author</th>
<th>Group/Discipline</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>Mode</th>
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<td>Course</td>
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<td>Music/Jazz</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Face to face</td>
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<tr>
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<td>PG</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>UG</td>
<td>1st</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bernus</td>
<td>SEET/ICTS</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>SEET/Science</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Course</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>SEET/Science</td>
<td>UG</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Course</td>
<td>Face to face</td>
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Synopses of each case

Case 1: Philosophy and Values in Education

This case uses a blended learning approach. It makes use of software developed by Griffith's Flexible Learning Access Service to facilitate peer and self-assessment within on-line groups. This software is called SAGE (Self and Group Evaluation). Each group also uses discussion forums facilitated through Learning@Griffith. The combined effect of these tools allows students to engage in discussion and critique of weekly set topics. In particular, this course aims to develop students' ability to use the community of inquiry method to conduct philosophical inquiry. This method is applied to the consideration of ethical dilemmas in Education which it is important for teachers to appreciate before they qualify and practice. The potency of the use of peer and self-assessment in this course is that, when combined with the on-line discussion forums, it actively creates a community of inquiry. Through direct participation in this method, students experience its worth as they are learning. By use of SAGE each student is able to engage in literally hundreds of reflective acts each week without administrative burden to the teaching staff.

Case 2: Jazz Instrumental ensembles

This case demonstrates how peer and self-assessment can be so intimately intrinsic to the process of learning that its very existence can be easily overlooked. It also demonstrates how the practice of peer and self-assessment can be embedded throughout an entire program of study. The practice entails members of 'ensembles'\(^1\) critiquing their own contributions and those of their fellow musicians. The ability to do this is not only critical to learning, but also critical to the ability of any ensemble to perform as a small team. Importantly, the nature of that performance does not only involve musical performance, members take other roles too: such as leader, communicator, coordinator, negotiator, researcher etc. These play their part in respect of the musical practice, learning and performance, and also in respect of other organisational and procedural tasks which musicians undertake to record and promote the ensemble. Accordingly this case is of interest to people beyond the music disciplines.

\(^1\)Ensembles are small groups of (7 to 10) musicians who practice, learn and perform together.

Case 3: Applied Counselling

This case demonstrates how peer and self-assessment can be used in a course delivered entirely in distance mode where there is no face to face contact with the lecturer at all. In this course self-assessment is used to encourage students to engage in ongoing skills practice, skills development, and self-reflection. These processes are combined with what has been termed "the companioning process" to
help direct these reflections to improvements in learning. The companioning process involves *Applied Counselling* students working in partnership with a mentor (or "companion") who is employed in a relevant human services field and who has demonstrated advanced skills in communication. Students and their respective companions work in a protégé-mentor relationship engaging in a sequence of role-play exercises detailed in a course study guide. The approach could be adapted in other courses to use student peers, and could also be further enhanced by use of SAGE (see case 1) and on-line discussion forums.

**Case 4: Information systems (in Business, Tourism, Hotel, Sport and Hospitality)**

This case demonstrates the effective use of peer and self-assessment in a large (500 approx per year), first-year, first semester course, attracting mostly school-leavers - up to 20% of whom are international students. Each of these elements of context are significant alone, but much more-so in combination. On the face of it, this context might be thought to present a 'worst case scenario' for implementing peer and self-assessment. Nevertheless, the case some of the potential merit in engaging students in the process of determining the assessment criteria by which they will be judged – and how this can be done. In doing so, it illustrates how peer and self-assessment can be used to achieve high levels of engagement from students (even in circumstances which may be regarded as sub-optimal).

**Case 5: Professional practice portfolio (Information and Communication Technology Systems)**

This case illustrates how groups of students can be engaged in critiquing presentations made by other groups of students, and how these critiques can help inform improved performance by both those who are critiqued, and those who do the critiquing. The practice described in this case is relatively simple to implement. It has clear benefits to the students. It is a technique which has wide applicability. It is also a technique which can be adopted in courses at any year level. Finally, organisational demands of this method are relatively low.

**Case 6: Forensic case studies**

This case illustrates how a simple technique (that of organising a debate between affirmative and negative teams) can be used as a central organising method for a course, and how the integration of peer and self-assessment into this technique results in high levels of student engagement. One of the key features of this case is also the illustration of authenticity: the method of engaging students directly models the kind of interactions they may expect to be involved in when employed after graduation. As such, there is also a high degree of alignment between the learning activities and the desired learning outcomes. As with case 5 this is a technique which is relatively simple to implement, has clear benefits to students, has wide applicability and, though illustrated here at the postgraduate level, could be adopted at other levels if students are appropriately supported.
Case 7: Research and innovation in forensic science

This case is a particularly good illustration of how separate items of assessment can be constructively aligned and sequenced to progressively develop students' understanding and skills in relation to the course's desired learning outcomes. Peer and self-assessment are integral to the developmental sequence. Furthermore, that sequence is staged such that the level of difficulty increases, and (as implied) each stage builds on the previous one. There are three stages: students begin working individually, progress to working as a collaborative team, and progress beyond this to work as inter-dependent teams assessing each other's work.

Case 8: Recruitment and selection

This case (like case 7) provides a good illustration of how separate items of assessment can be constructively aligned to progressively develop students' understanding and skills in relation to the course's desired learning outcomes. In this case there are four assignments which are linked in a developmental sequence, each of which involves peer and/or self-assessment.

Case 9: Performance and reward management

This case (like case 5) illustrates how students (individually and collectively) can be engaged in critiquing presentations made by other groups of students, and how these critiques can help inform improved performance by both those who are critiqued, and those who do the critiquing. The practice described in this case is among the most simple to implement. It has clear benefits to the students. It is a technique which has wide applicability. It is also a technique which can be adopted in courses at any year level. Finally, organisational demands of this method are relatively low.

Conclusion

This introduction to nine case studies in peer and self-assessment has served to describe the organisational structure of those cases, summarise the range of contexts to which they relate, and provide brief summaries of the cases. Together it is hoped that this information helps readers to identify cases which are of most interest and relevance to them – and to encourage increased use of peer and self-assessment throughout all courses and programs.

References