

Integrating Self and Peer- Assessment in an Animal Health Degree. A quick survival guide

Olivier A. E. Sparagano

School of Agriculture, Food and Rural
Development

University of Newcastle

olivier.sparagano@ncl.ac.uk

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Why we need to change our assessment methods?

- We are currently selecting the students who better perform with final written exams (we cannot evaluate students skills properly if we are so selective)
- we are not responding to employers' needs when they are recruiting graduates (big companies are now recruiting trainees at school level and train them directly)
- In a global Education market we are competing with U.S., Canada and Australia for overseas diplomas (recruitment and financial issues)
- The Lord Robert's report and the new requirements from Research Councils at PG levels mean that we need to think about giving long-term skills at UG level too.
- AND next year the top-up fees situation will force Universities to be more accountable for (from students, parents and local authorities awarding grants)

Parasitology situation

- Lack of interest
 - only 5-10 % of our graduates stay in microbiology so it is pointless to give them only discipline-related skills (and that would apply to many topics in Life Science)
- Year 2 parasitology (compulsory module: 22 students); Year 3 parasitology (optional module: 5 students) (since new format; 30 students)

Parasitology situation (2)

- Safety problems
 - live parasites are not permitted in the classroom
 - practical classes have to be environmentally friendly, without risks, no dissection permitted but still pedagogically challenging and entertaining;
 - any idea how to do it?
- Lack of funding for field trips, laboratory classes and external visits (QAA is gone long live the RAE = no chance to get more teaching credits from your HoS)

long-life skills

- Judging future colleagues and job applicants
- Defending their point of view /report /strategy
- Deal with stress, deadlines, work pressure...
- Being numerate (do not ask me the results of my last practical about dilution, pH, molarity and normality: a disaster!)
- Can speak and write fluently without acronyms or shortening words like we do with mobile phones.
- Are we not failing our students or at least future employers???

Module new format

- Minimum parasitology lectures
- new assignments:
 - peer-assessment
 - self-assessment
 - impromptu oral exercise
- Contact with non academic colleagues (recruiting and career officers, University Press Office, Audio-visual services, guest speakers, sponsors....)

Marking

- 50% for the conference
- 25% for continuous assessment (including computer-based exercise, impromptu oral and destabilising group presentation)
- 25% for the final exam
- (There is no resit exam for Year 3 students)

Conference format

- Two guest speakers
- Students doing conference talks (groups of 4-7 students)
- The students organise their own conference committee
- They need to find sponsorship and will decide on (almost) everything: conference format, guest speakers, publicity.....

Peer and self assessment

- The Conference audience returns 2 marks
 - One general mark for the conference organization (1 mark shared by the whole class)
 - One mark for each student group presentation
- then
 - 1st mark modulated by the whole group for each individual
 - 2nd mark modulated by the student group itself

Peer and self-assessment (2)

- The academic module leader is at the end modulating the students mark according to a pre-agreement programme (minimum number of participants or sponsorship level expected...).

Problems encountered

- University administration
- Colleagues' doubts
- Political attitude in Academia
- Students perplexity at marking each other

Positive aspects

- Sense of achievement and ownership from the students
- Observed creativity from the students
- High performance from borderline students who failed so many final exams
- Clear support from external organisation (HEFCE, Centre for Biosciences....) funding this teaching and learning activity.

Conclusions (1)

- Still some work to be done on feedback and training the students for peer and self - assessment
- at the end the students are positive about their experience even if they consider that the workload is far too high for such moderate reward (module representing only 10 credits)
- There is still a need to diversify even further the assessment programme (computer-based teaching and examination, peer-teaching, placement...)
- There is a need to exchange information about what other colleagues are doing and help teachers' mobility

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