From Beyond the Grade: Reflections on Assessments in the Context of Case-Based Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The literature identifies challenges in assessing case-based teaching, including avoiding selectivity and subjectivity, assessing multiple solutions, managing group work, providing timely feedback and motivating engagement. The objective of this study is to consider student and lecturer views on the assessment of case-based teaching, to obtain an integrated view of how such challenges are reflected in the classroom and suggest possible interventions. The methodology involves a multi-stakeholder approach, using student surveys, lecturer reflections and focus groups. The key themes emerging are the interplay between assessment and group dynamics, the relationship between grading and motivation, the experience of informal peer evaluation, deficiencies in the provision of feedback, and differing perspectives on reliability and fairness. The findings highlight the need for clear communication with students, active management of group work, and insights into students' interactions and competitive instincts as a precursor to achieving engagement with the learning activities.

Key Words: assessment; case-based teaching; group work

INTRODUCTION

Crooks (1988), in summarising the early literature on the role of assessment, states that evaluation is one of the most potent forces in education as it signals what is important, affects student motivation and influences the development of learning skills and strategies. Ideally, assessment is both valid, in that it relates to all learning outcomes, and reliable, in that it is both objective and replicable (International Federation of Accountants, 2004).

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However, Herbert et al. (2009) point out that assessment practices can rarely achieve both reliability and validity and that the assessment of higher order learning outcomes driven by active learning approaches may be problematic. If approaches such as case-based teaching are to be successfully introduced and maintained, the problematic nature of their assessment practices must be addressed.

The benefits of case-based teaching as a vehicle for learning both within and beyond the business curriculum are well established (Cullen et al., 2004; Milne and McConnell, 2001). In addition to subject-specific knowledge, the learning objectives of case-based teaching include the development of skills in critical thinking, collaborative learning and communication (Boyce et al., 2001). The literature points to a number of challenges in aligning assessment practices to the learning objectives of case-based teaching (Libby, 1991). These challenges include the difficulty in objectively assessing activities such as group work and presentations, which form an integral part of the case method. In addition, the emphasis in the case method on the validity of multiple solutions rather than just 'one right answer' requires assessment of the learning process as well as the eventual student output.

The research objective of this study is to consider student and lecturer views on the assessment of case-based teaching, with a view to obtaining an integrated view of the manner in which the different challenges identified in the literature reflect the experience in the classroom. Its contribution therefore is the generation of a more coherent and complete picture of the assessment challenges of case-based teaching.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The current literature on case-based teaching and the assessment challenges it poses in practice are described in the next section. The methodology, which involves a rigorous multi-stakeholder approach, using student surveys, lecturer reflections and focus groups, is then discussed. The research setting involving undergraduate case-based teaching over five iterations is described in detail, providing the reader with a context for the research findings that follow. The findings identify key themes which emerge from the data analysis and the implications of these for educators are also highlighted.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The Context of Case-Based Teaching

The use of case study pedagogies has been addressed extensively in the literature. It has been established that the case method has the potential to engage and motivate students, to encourage self-learning and to develop skills in critical thinking. However, challenges to achieving this potential also exist (Libby, 1991). The successful use of case studies requires lecturers to relinquish control and allow students to determine their own approaches, with an emphasis on the process of analysis rather than on the finished product (Adler et al., 2004; Boyce et al., 2001; Healy and McCutcheon, 2010; Wynn-Williams et al., 2008). Typically, case studies will engage the student in a process of analysis, reasoning and decision making, and will also involve small and large group discussions to facilitate interaction with others and presentations which develop skills in communication. These activities offer the means of achieving a set of rich and varied learning objectives but present a

challenge in designing appropriate assessment (Boyce et al., 2001). The alignment of the learning activities (Biggs, 1996) with assessment practices is essential to enable achievement of these objectives.

The Assessment Challenge for Case-Based Teaching
Case-based teaching seeks to deliver higher-order learning outcomes, yet the validity of its assessment is problematic. Herbert et al. (2009) underline the tension which exists between reliability and validity in relation to assessment practices. Reliability in assessment relates to the objectivity or replicability of the assessment process, while validity relates to the applicability of assessment to all learning outcomes. For example, the multiple choice questionnaire achieves reliability and breadth but does not offer a valid solution to the challenge of assessing higher-order learning outcomes. Other approaches, for example oral presentations, which are a feature of case-based teaching, may lead to selectivity and subjectivity (International Federation of Accountants, 2004).

A valid assessment strategy seeks to assess all learning outcomes; however, as Willis (1993) points out, there may be inconsistencies between espoused theory and actual practice. Thus educators may speak of teaching for understanding but this rhetoric will be meaningless if assessment strategies are not context specific and emphasise product rather than process. Assessment of product rather than process is a concern in case-based teaching where students are encouraged to believe that there is 'no single right answer'. It is far more challenging to find reliable methods of assessing questions or problems with multiple approaches rather than with single solutions (International Federation of Accountants, 2004). This can lead to assessment being focused on a narrow range of more measurable outcomes. Gibbs and Simpson (2004) argue that assessment should be primarily designed to support learning and that reliability should be a secondary consideration.

Assessment of Case-Based Teaching in Practice
A desired learning outcome when using case-based teaching is the development of skills in effective collaboration. The benefits of group work from the student perspective in terms of skills and active learning are well established (Ballantine and McCourt Larres, 2007; Cadiz Dyball et al., 2007; Davies, 2009). Collaborative effort or group work is inherently difficult to assess (Cadiz Dyball et al., 2007). Group tasks need to be structured so that individuals have a vested interest in working with each other, rather than simply dividing the assigned task into stand-alone sub-tasks. Efforts to eliminate free-rider and 'sucker' effects (Davies, 2009), for example through the use of monitoring, peer evaluation and learning logs, are time-consuming and have had mixed results to date (Ballantine and McCourt Larres, 2007; Gammie and Matson, 2007). Peer assessment (often discussed in the context of the assessment of group work) can itself constitute a vehicle for reflection and self-evaluation (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). However, the process of peer assessment is reported as being generally disliked by students, with many having little faith in their own and other students' ability to be informed and fair assessors (Ballantyne et al., 2002). It has also been suggested that peer assessment may lead to other difficulties affecting marking, for example student

reluctance to mark down better students and issues concerning friendship (or personal dislike) and collusion (Ballantyne et al., 2002; Pond et al., 2007).

Formative assessment or feedback has the potential to yield substantial learning gains (Black and Wiliam, 1998). MacLellan (2001) suggests that many students find feedback as received to be much less useful than lecturers anticipate. Its impact appears to be reduced by being either too soon or too late after the assessment, by being infrequent and by being accompanied by grades (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). Given its less structured format relative to other learning activities, case-based teaching may not provide opportunities for timely feedback. The provision of meaningful feedback is extremely resource intensive and is increasingly problematic as class sizes increase (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004).

Students may also be reluctant participants in case-based activities, with assessment used as a motivator for engagement. For example, accounting students, who tend to be introverted and individualist (Booth and Winzar, 1993), may not willingly participate in group work and presentations, but may be motivated by assessment to do so. Assessment motivates their participation but this is not necessarily sufficient for engagement and deeper learning. Rust (2002) points out that where a task has little relevance or importance beyond assessment, then evidence suggests that students will take a surface approach to its completion, simply 'learning for assessment'. Rust (2002) further suggests that motivation beyond assessment is essential for engagement. Volet and Mansfield (2006) argue that students whose personal goals extended beyond performance to include learning and social issues respond more positively to challenges such as group work.

In summary, the literature has identified a number of challenges which arise in assessing case-based teaching, including avoiding potential selectivity and subjectivity in the assessment of activities such as presentations, assessing the process of arriving at multiple solutions rather than the output of a single right answer, managing issues such as free-rider activity in group work, providing timely feedback, and motivating engagement as well as participation. The research objective of this study is to consider student and lecturer views on the assessment of case-based teaching, in order to obtain an integrated view of the manner in which these challenges are reflected in the experiences in the classroom. Its contribution therefore is the generation of a more coherent and complete picture of the assessment challenges of case-based teaching.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study explores student and lecturer views on the assessment of case-based teaching. The specific context in which this study takes place is that of the teaching of accounting and finance, using case-based methods, at one Irish university. Student views of each case session were gathered via an anonymous survey administered at the end of the class. In summary, students were asked a series of open-ended questions regarding what they felt they had learned in the class, what aspects worked well and didn't work well, and what changes could be made, both on their own part and on the part of the lecturer. There were no specific questions on assessment; therefore contributions in relation to assessment were unprompted. The questions were designed to be as broad as possible and specifically were

not drawn from the literature to avoid any researcher preconceptions that might limit the student response. Table 1 summarises the response rates to the student survey for each of the five case sessions reported in this paper. In total, 52 per cent (144 of 277 respondents) of the students raised assessment as an issue in their responses. The use of open-ended questions, whilst more time-consuming to analyse, allowed students to answer in their own terms, unconstrained by researcher perceptions of possible responses (Brennan, 1998; Bryman and Bell, 2003) and was deemed appropriate given the exploratory nature of the underlying research objective (Saunders et al., 2009).

Table 1: Student Survey Response Rates

	Class Size	Response Rate	Response Rate %	Number Raising Assessment
Case 1:'WorldCom'				
Iteration #1	84	79	94%	66 (83%)
Iteration #2	37	33	89%	20 (61%)
Case 2:'Cadbury Schweppes'				
Iteration #1	84	67	80%	21 (31%)
Iteration #2	47	35	74%	14 (40%)
Case 3:'The Bakery'	72	63	84%	23 (36%)

In addition to the student surveys described earlier, three student focus groups were also conducted. Focus groups offer the advantage of allowing the views of a number of participants to emerge and for others to react and respond to those views, lending breadth and depth to the research evidence (Bryman and Bell, 2003; Saunders et al., 2009). The first focus group took place after the first iterations of Cases 1 and 2, the second after the second iterations of Cases 1 and 2 and the final focus group after Case 3. In each instance students were randomly selected from the class list and invited by email to participate. Each focus group was conducted by members of the research team who had not been involved in the delivery of the case sessions under discussion. The protocol followed in all groups was the same. Students were given generalised prompts and discussion of assessment was instigated by the students, rather than introduced by the focus group facilitators. The discussion was audio recorded with the prior permission of the participating students. In addition, one researcher made notes of the discussion on a series of flip chart pages visible to all participants, thereby increasing researcher confidence in the development of an accurate understanding and reflection of the experiences being described (Saunders et al., 2009). The conversations were transcribed and independently checked against the original recording by each of the researchers, to ensure not just a concise reproduction of the conversations, but also to appreciate a sense of the nuances and emphasis placed on those words by individual students.

Three of the researchers were directly involved in teaching the case sessions. Each lecturer recorded their expectations and concerns prior to the case session and their

reflections immediately after each session before having sight of any of the student data. The use of this multi-stakeholder approach to addressing the research objective was chosen to bring greater rigour and balance to the research evidence.

THE RESEARCH SETTING

The research study took place during the academic year 2009/2010. The specific setting of the research was the teaching of three case studies: a corporate governance case (WorldCom) over two iterations, a corporate finance case (Cadbury Schweppes) over two iterations and a management accounting case (the Bakery) over one iteration. The cases were used in mixed classes drawn from the third and fourth years of a variety of business undergraduate programmes. Detailed assessment protocols for each case are shown in Table 2 and described in the paragraphs that follow.

Table 2: Assessment Protocols for each Case Session

Case	(1) WorldCom	(2) Cadbury Schweppes	(3) The Bakery
Pre-class	Groups of six students prepare seven motions for debate *Not Assessed*	Groups of six students prepare a statement for a board meeting based on a pre-assigned role *Not Assessed*	Groups of three students identify key strategic concerns from the perspective of an assigned family member; submit these to lecturer *Assessed*
In class	Groups are assigned a single motion and select one member to debate that motion *Assessed*	One group member participates in board meeting to decide on merger *Assessed* Groups then reconvene and vote on merger	Groups of twelve meet to decide family strategy; decisions presented to class as a whole by group representatives *Assessed*
Peer evaluation	Class votes on winner of each debate *Not Assessed*	None	Class evaluates each group; outcome of evaluation circulated *Not Assessed*
Post-class	Group submits an integrative assignment *Assessed*	Group submits an integrative assignment *Assessed*	Students sit individual interim exam *Assessed*

Group work was a key component of the teaching approach used for all classes in the research study. It was viewed by the lecturers as being particularly appropriate to case

study analysis and necessary for a student body whose prior experiences have been almost exclusively oriented toward individual effort and achievement. For each case session the lecturer decided on the group composition. Group size was typically six students, although in the bakery case groups of three were formed for pre-class work and subsequently combined to form groups of twelve for the in-class activities. For each session the output of the group work was assessed but there was no assessment of the process, which was typically unobserved. For the bakery case group work accounted for 30 per cent of the assessment with an individual examination accounting for the balance. For the other cases the entire assessment comprised elements of group work.

For each case session the lecturer sought to create opportunities for structured interaction (Pearce, 2002) as a means of both developing soft skills and exposing students to multiple viewpoints. In the WorldCom case this took the form of a series of debates on seven different motions concerning the actions of the individuals in the case. A representative of each group was required to debate one of these motions. While all seven motions had been provided in advance the groups were not assigned their specific motion for debate until the class itself. Part of the group's overall mark was determined by their representative's conduct in the debate. For the Cadbury Schweppes case a board meeting was held and a representative of each group attended in a role which had been assigned in advance. The representative's individual contribution at the board meeting formed the basis of one part of the assessment. For the bakery case, students in groups of twelve formed family councils with the objective of agreeing future strategy for the bakery. Assessment in this instance was based on the presentation to the class as a whole of the strategy emerging from the group by self-selected representatives. In addition to the assessment of activities in class, written group work, submitted in advance of the class for the bakery case and post-class for the other cases, was included in the grading process.

Some informal elements of peer evaluation were included in the WorldCom and bakery cases. In the WorldCom case the class as a whole voted on each motion to determine which speaker's group had 'won' the debate. In the bakery case students were asked to grade each presentation based on content, visuals and oral presentation. These evaluations were not factored into the final grade but their outcome was circulated to the students.

In each instance the case session class was constrained to a single two-hour timetabled slot. Traditional teaching rooms were used for the assessed in-class activities. The pre-class activities were assigned one week in advance of the class and the students were given one week for the follow-on activities. Approaches to feedback varied between cases and between different iterations of the cases. Generally the lecturer chose not to interrupt the flow of the class by intervening to correct individual errors or comment on individual contributions. In some instances general feedback was given during class which either praised specific aspects of the analysis or corrected common errors. More detailed feedback was given in the weeks following the case session class. Students were also informed that they could seek specific feedback from individual lecturers on their group's performance.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The key themes in relation to assessment which emerged from analysis of the student surveys, focus group meetings and lecturer reflections related to the interplay between assessment and group dynamics, the relationship between grading and motivation, the experience of informal peer evaluation mechanisms, deficiencies in the provision of feedback, and differing perspectives on reliability and fairness. Each of these is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The Interplay between Assessment and Group Dynamics

Students clearly recognised the benefits of working in groups. These benefits were commented on more frequently by students participating in sessions where group work was in class, was observed by the lecturer and where the groups were forced to come to a conclusion within a fixed time period. The group size preferred by students was three or four members. Where groups in this study were significantly larger the student preference was to downsize in that direction, for example from seven to five.

> Three is a perfect number really … three is very good, yeah … you agree on everything, you never really have arguments 'cos it's always going to be two against one so … (general laughter).

Logistical issues were important to students in relation to the composition of work groups. Students found it easier to organise group meetings with students who had similar timetables to themselves (and by implication were following the same degree programme). On balance there was a weak, but not overriding, preference for self-selection of group members and for settled groups over time. One student stated:

> It just means you know what each person is good at. You can say, right, well would you do this because you did that last time, and you start to know [what] people are capable of. It just makes it that bit more efficient.

An obvious issue that arises with group work is the division of work within the group and what recognition, if any, the assessment should give to the resultant differential contributions and efforts (Davies, 2009; Volet and Mansfield, 2006). The literature argues that individual assessment undermines the ethos of teamwork (Adler and Milne, 1997). However, it also recognises the issue of unequal contributions and the free-rider problem (Brooks and Ammons, 2003; Davies, 2009). Some advocate the use of mechanisms such as peer assessment to arrive at individualised differential marks within a group (Pond et al., 2007); however counter arguments also exist (Ballantine and McCourt Larres, 2007). None of these mechanisms were used by lecturers in the study and students were rather dismissive of their effectiveness. In fact, students displayed quite sophisticated insights into the possibilities offered for 'gaming' such mechanisms during group formation:

> You want to pick somebody weak 'cos you get double the marks.

Free-rider issues were also mentioned: students appeared to accept them as an inevitability of group work and were sceptical of the standard solutions adopted:

> But if you just had a peer evaluation form … if you knew that there was some mark going for what you're actually putting in. … But it would really have to be investigated like – you couldn't just take the marks. … What would happen to somebody that was doing a lot of work that they were the only people that knew about and then was just shy at meetings. … I suppose there's no way perfect, but … it needs work.

> You rate the person that you were with – but everyone just gives each other five because you're [all] there when you're writing it down.

The Relationship between Grading and Motivation
While assessment marks are clearly a strong motivator, the findings of this study suggest that students also valued opportunities to develop soft skills and responded to the opportunities offered for peer approval in a group work setting. Some of the tasks, for example the role-playing of board members, were not specifically assessed but were taken very seriously by the students. Students appeared to identify with the characters or motions they were championing and were anxious for their point of view to prevail or 'win'. Those activities that had been deliberately set up to ignite the competitive streak within the class did seem to motivate.

In reflecting on the design of the course assignments in advance of class, one lecturer in particular expressed concern about a relatively smaller workload required for the given level of marks awarded for the case assignment relative to assignments in previous years:

> I would still have a concern that the amount of work required is small relative to a traditional (for me) form of continuous assessment; however the benefits of this session, in enhanced student interest and engagement, actively working in groups, and combining a broad and deep analysis of the merger, outweigh this concern.

As it turned out, the outputs and the observed processes in the debate and large group discussions indicated that students' level of preparation and analysis went beyond what would be expected based on experience of other forms of assigned work such as essays and written projects. There appeared to be an element of students wanting to impress their peers which enhanced their efforts, or alternatively the students may simply have found the tasks more stimulating.

The concern of the students in relation to workload relative to grading had a different emphasis and centred on unrewarded effort where only some aspects of the preparation were apparent. For example, one student stated:

> The lecturer should make an effort to ask a few questions to each group; it would give people a chance to stand up for themselves and show their preparation.

Students take a short-term approach to their time management, skipping lectures and tutorials to complete assigned tasks, even while recognising that they are missing material with longer-term consequences:

> You put hours and hours into a case you know, getting it perfected, and then you can just ruin all that with one bad exam … because you don't have time to study for the exams, because you put so much time into the case, basically.

The Experience of Informal Peer Evaluation Mechanisms
No formal peer evaluation was included in any of the assessment protocols but two informal mechanisms were used: the voting system in the WorldCom case and an informal evaluation process in the bakery case. Interestingly, the competitive instincts of students were aroused even when they were explicitly made aware that no marks would be awarded for these evaluations. For instance, where the class protocol included a vote on each motion under debate students tended to vote in support of classmates rather than on the merit of the points made, even though the vote had no impact on grading. This action also evoked quite strong feelings in survey responses even though it was the element of the class activity most under student control. Competitiveness and class loyalty outweighed objective faculties to the extent that significant numbers of students criticised their own behaviour:

> The voting system – totally biased; people vote for people in their course – FACT!

> Ensure no block voting that was apparent today – like the Eurovision.

> Some people in other groups did not take the scoring card seriously, e.g. giving some groups minus marks.

Another issue that was of concern to the students was the importance of 'preserving face'. Irrespective of the presence or absence of formal peer evaluation, students wanted to be seen by peers to perform well, while avoiding appearing unprepared or unprofessional. The payoffs at either end of this spectrum ranged from pride to embarrassment. These issues were reflected in comments such as:

> You know other people know it as well, so they'll pick out any mistakes.

> You're on the spot; you're making a fool of yourself if you get it wrong.

Deficiencies in the Provision of Feedback
The difficulty of giving valid on-the-spot feedback to the students was an issue of concern to the lecturers. Time constraints and the pressures induced in the process of absorbing content and reflecting on it as it is delivered meant that for the lecturers there was a real

missed opportunity to provide formative feedback, not just to the presenter, but to the class as a whole. This was described as follows:

> Personally I would like to have been able to contribute after each motion by way of summary or highlight. This was not done due to (a) time constraints, (b) need to keep up continuity and (c) fairness across groups as the feedback could potentially have given advantage to later groups if they were quick enough to follow the trend of feedback and amend the verbal aspects of their presentation accordingly.

> I am processing several ideas simultaneously and none of them very well; considering the students' oral presentation skills, reading their content from the screen, grading and time-keeping. I'm listening and reading, reflecting and preparing feedback.

There was also a tension felt by one lecturer between the need to recognise that there are 'multiple valid approaches' and the need to correct basic errors which could serve to mislead and confuse other students. Equally, there was the issue of providing affirmation and encouragement to inexperienced student speakers, in particular as the strategy adopted by many of the student groups resulted in them putting forward a spokesperson on a basis unrelated to who was their best or most confident speaker.

The desire for greater feedback following the release of grades awarded was also raised by students. Despite lecturer concerns regarding the bunching of grades, students still requested feedback as to the reasons why their particular group had achieved a lower mark than another group, even when the percentage gap was so small that it would have virtually disappeared in rounding when the aggregate module mark was calculated. From the student perspective (or at least the perspective of those who raised the issue), the grade relative to that of peers was highly significant. It should be said, however, that the student queries, although prompted by relative grades, were focused on feed forward concerns of how they could do better in the future rather than seeking to change the mark awarded:

> You know, you might put an awful lot of work into an assignment, and you might get only an average mark, and you mightn't know where you went wrong, and you might sit down and do the next assignment, and do it the exact same way. You're not learning anything. I think there should definitely be a lecture after an assignment had been marked to give feedback.

> He [the lecturer] said that if you want to come up and ask me about the presentation, come up. Well, if I hadn't done that, well I wouldn't have known what I did wrong like. … I didn't know if it was the presentation or what was wrong.

Differing Perspectives on Reliability and Fairness
The difficulty in developing reliable marking schemes for activities which combined soft skills, for example presentation and role-playing, with analysis, was a concern expressed

by two of the lecturers prior to the case sessions. This concern was compounded in their minds by the potential free-rider issues inherent in group work. A consequence of the concern with the reliability of the assessment metrics was a relative bunching of grades awarded. This did not arise when the bulk of the assessment was in the form of a standard written examination but it was notable with the other two protocols (the debate and the board meeting).

Students, while alert to the potential free-rider issues discussed earlier, were more concerned with fairness rather than reliability, and in particular with inter-group fairness. They noticed and appreciated equitable treatment. For instance, in the debate format the lecturer was strict in the implementation of time limits and this was commented on favourably by many students:

> Equal time per group so everyone was one, the same level, and no advantages.

Students also commented on perceived problems with assigning tasks of varying levels of difficulty to different groups – a consequence of lecturers' attempts to provide variety in assigned tasks and to maximise the learning experience for all students from in-class presentations. For instance, one student's reaction to this in relation to the debate protocol was to state:

> [need to] be luckier and get an easier topic than trying to defend the indefensible.

Students offered original insights on the concept of intra-group fairness within project groups. While the literature may emphasise the free-rider issue discussed previously, the students raised a different set of concerns that might be loosely termed as the 'burden on one' – in a sense almost a converse, or negative, of the free-rider issue. This is where an undue workload or representative burden is placed on, or falls upon, a single group member. It arises both in summarising tasks and in presentations where a full group is represented by a single speaker. Some group members are disempowered in large class settings where it is impractical to give everyone a chance to speak. Students stated:

> There's a lot of emphasis on just one person in the group. … If that person does a bad presentation, say, then it's affecting the other four people as well.

> Like you know if marks are going for it in a group then you don't want to be the one to go up and have a bad presentation and then be blamed for everyone else not getting good marks.

There is a dual aspect to this issue: as well as the burden on the group representative, there is also the issue of the unassessed contribution of the other group members and the relative invisibility of their efforts.

> As a team member who researched and prepared to speak on three topics, but [these three] didn't come up, I feel it may be slightly unfair.

An additional issue, related to perceived fairness, was the students' sense of whether they were adequately prepared for what was in store for them:

> I didn't feel informed enough about what was going to happen on the day; it was a lot more relaxed than I thought it was going to be. I thought it was going to be a formal debate type of thing, like the groups, but it was a lot more relaxed, yeah. … I'd say we'd get more out of it if we went back and did that similar format again, now that we know what it involves … 'cos when it's written down on a sheet, ok! I remember when we got it first. What … what is going on here?

It is interesting to note how this sense of the importance of knowing the rules of the game relates to more than assessment; it also relates to the level of engagement with the process as a whole.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research objective of this study is to consider lecturer and student views on the assessment of case-based teaching, in order to obtain an integrated perspective on the manner in which the different challenges identified in the literature reflect the experience in the classroom. In summary, the lecturer and student views of assessment in the context of case-based teaching broadly support the position advanced in the current literature, but go further in some instances.

Students and lecturers recognise the benefits of group work. Many of the problematic areas in group work (for example free-rider issues) were identified in the responses but existing solutions, such as peer assessment, were not advocated by the research participants. Both groups believed that the implementation of group work needs further development, particularly regarding the composition of groups and the oversight of group activities. It is important therefore that lecturers considering the use of groups as part of case-based teaching prepare to actively manage the process and develop mechanisms for observing group work.

This research study also gives insights into the complex world of student interactions. The effort and anxiety which the students displayed in these exercises was disproportionate to the marks allocated and seems to some extent at least to relate to the strong motivating influence of peer esteem. This may also explain a pre-occupation with the professional appearance of their slides, the unwillingness to critique each other's work and the participation in dysfunctional behaviour, however reluctantly. Group pressures may be particularly marked with these students as they spend up to four years together in cohesive class groupings (being quite homogeneous in age, ethnicity and geographical origin, and often required to follow the same, or similar, module sequences). Comparative

research in the future may reveal whether this cultural and social context results in stronger loyalty to peers, less weight to self-interest and loyalty to objective standards than is experienced elsewhere. A greater understanding of the dynamics of peer interaction could lead to better informed strategies for encouraging peer learning in the classroom and more effective regulation of collaborative learning.

The literature points to the difficulty in using assessment to motivate students to move beyond mere participation towards engagement with the learning activities. In this study, for many students engagement with the learning activities appeared to stem as much from their perceived value in terms of workplace skills as it did from a desire to gain marks. To some extent this reflects what Rust (2002) and Volet and Mansfield (2006) have to say about the importance of the inherent value of the learning activities; after all, assessment can only do so much. However, one neglected aspect of motivation is competitiveness, which was revealed in this study through pre-occupation with the relative grade and the importance of the non-graded peer evaluations. The literature emphasises individual learning against an objective standard of targeted learning outcomes. In this context student interest in comparative grades is either ignored or seen as undesirable. However, such an egalitarian view of education is at odds with the highly competitive work environment that many students are preparing for, particularly in professional fields like accounting, where relative as well as absolute performance is routinely assessed. If this competitiveness can be effectively harnessed, case-based teaching can be used more effectively to motivate deeper learning. However, student behaviour when motivated by competiveness can become dysfunctional. In this study, for example, the informal peer evaluation mechanisms led students to simultaneously vote in a biased manner and complain about their collective behaviour in so doing. The findings to date suggest that attempts to harness the students' competitive instinct need to be sensitively implemented. Further research is needed to empirically investigate and develop a greater understanding of the manner in which students are motivated by the nature of the learning activities themselves, as opposed to the assessment of those activities.

As predicted in the literature, the provision of appropriate feedback was viewed as problematic by lecturers, given the need to recognise and encourage multiple valid approaches. The desire for feedback was also raised by students. However this issue related primarily to feed forward concerns, i.e. how they could do better in the future. This suggests the need for lecturers to provide clear signposting to students at the outset of their expectations in relation to the various activities which constitute the case-based teaching experience. Future research in the area of feedback would benefit from focusing on the need to communicate expectations to students prior to as well as subsequent to the completion of tasks.

The literature discusses reliability in relation to the application of grading metrics which are replicable and defensible. While lecturers in this study displayed similar concerns, students appeared to take as given the reliability of the grading process and were more concerned with issues of fairness. The sense of the importance of fair play goes beyond the well-documented concerns with free-rider problems to a broader concern over whether

marks reflect effort. Students appear to accept that some social loafing is inevitable but are more concerned where efforts are not rewarded and where one student's performance, for good or ill, determines the grade of the group as a whole. They appear to see it to be more problematic where their own grade does not reflect their own efforts than when their efforts are reflected in another classmate's grades. Their concerns were that the assessment criteria be evenhandedly applied and that they be adequately informed of the assessment protocols and lecturer expectations in advance. Here again, this suggests that one avenue for improvement is to focus on greater communication and transparency to signal to students the rules of the game. While such rules may be flawed in objective terms they can still provide a valid means of assessing learning outcomes, acceptable to student and lecturer alike.

This study brings together many of the different challenges of the assessment of case-based teaching identified in the literature and also highlights a number of aspects of the assessment process which were not previously developed. In particular, it emphasises the need for clear communication with students in relation to the nature of case-based learning activities and the assessment metrics to be used. It calls for more active management of group work as a means of realising the potential benefits of collaborative learning. It points to the need for a greater understanding of students' competitive instincts and the nature of their interactions as a precursor to attaining engagement with rather than participation in the learning activities.

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