

“Critical Perspectives in Business Psychology”: the evaluation of a 3rd-year undergraduate module.

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Theme

Moore (2003) suggests the following principles should underpin the evaluation of teaching. Evaluation should:

1. Be an integral part of our teaching practice
2. Be an ongoing process, so that we learn from systematic reflection
3. Be participatory
4. Enable us to make appropriate modifications along the way
5. Enable us to make judgements on specific teaching sessions, but also to draw out wider implications

Based on these principles the following research was conducted to evaluate the module “Critical Perspectives in Business Psychology”, which was taught at level 6 as a core module for students on the BA in Business Psychology and as elective for students on other courses.

for the purpose of evaluating this module was to: enhance students learning and development by reviewing the content and delivery of the module and updating it according to student and tutor feedback; allow students to have an influence on the continuing development of the module, through mid-term feedback; and give the author the opportunity to evaluate module updates previously implemented and reflect on them accordingly. Due to a recent review of the university’s undergraduate and postgraduate courses, some changes have been made to courses within LMBS, including the BA in Business Psychology. At the beginning of this project it seemed that this module would be repeated the following year. However, since then it has become apparent that it will not be offered again until possibly 2013/14. These circumstances are rather unsettling for all stakeholders and add to the difficulty of future planning. Nevertheless, it is hoped that lessons learned from this evaluation will remain relevant for future practice.

Context

The module Critical Perspectives in Business Psychology is a third year undergraduate module and currently fits within the course of Business Psychology. It is a core subject for students on the Business Psychology course; however, students from other courses (i.e. Business and Human Resource Management, etc.) sometimes choose the module as an elective. There is a prerequisite for students to have successfully completed a psychology module at level 4 or above, which is designed to ensure students have a basic understanding of mainstream approaches and psychological theories. The overall aim of the module Critical Perspectives in Business Psychology is to build on this foundation and expose students to new critical perspectives.

Psychology courses at Honours level are expected to present students with multiple perspectives in a way that fosters critical evaluation (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007). To ensure that the module being investigated supports achievement of this learning goal, it has been important to take into account the wider context of psychology as a professional field. Graduates in Business Psychology very often move into the field of human resources and business management, where having gained insight into different perceptions, understandings and motivations will enhance the management and leadership of people. . Additionally, such insights will allow graduates to challenge assumptions, values and practices that help to maintain an unjust and unsatisfying status quo within organisations (Fox, Prilleltensky & Austin, 2009).

Rationale

Evaluation of teaching has become much more common practice within the last thirty years and is now regarded as an integral part of the teaching process. It is also widely recognised that new lecturers wish to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of their teaching to ensure that they are “doing OK” (Hounsell, 1999). The current evaluation project provides a good opportunity to do exactly this and to receive valuable feedback from students and colleagues and from my own self-reflection.

As a fairly new member of staff I taught this module first in 2010/11, using existing material. At that time, 11 students were registered on the module. Throughout the term, I had reservations about the content and delivery, but proceeded in case the purpose became clearer as the course progressed, which unfortunately didn't happen. In order to gain an additional perspective, feedback was sought from the students. Although it was mostly positive overall, there were some comments that suggested the content was not critical enough and did not reflect the module title, which matched my own experience of the module. Consequently, the module content was reviewed and updated in accordance with the module specification prior to 2011/12. Individual sessions were revised throughout the year, and a guest

speaker who currently conducts research in the relevant area was invited to contribute

The aim of the current study has been to review the changes already made and evaluate the current state of the module. After considering different models for evaluation from Jacobs (2000), Kirkpatrick (2006) and others, it was decided to use Moore's model since it mirrors the values and views of the author (see principles given above)..

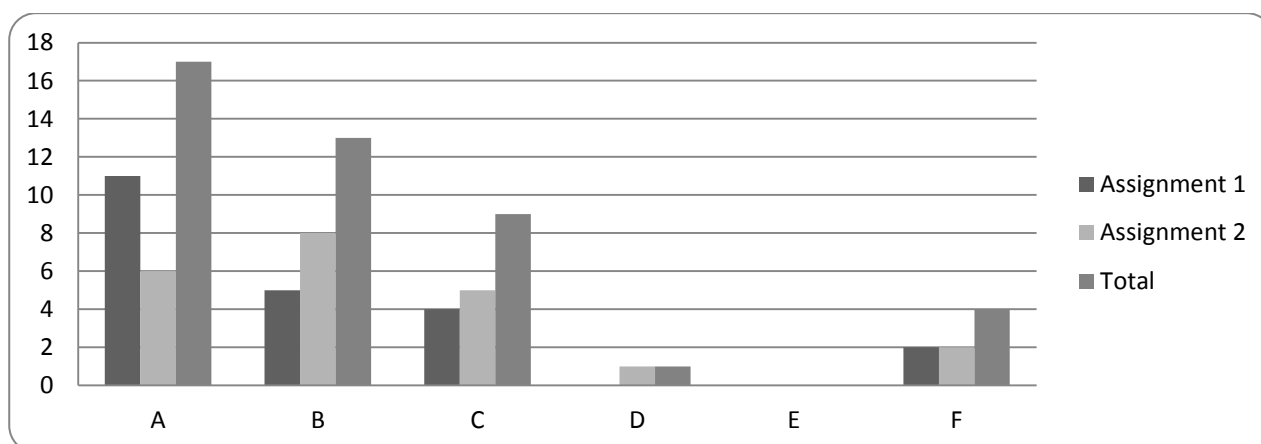
Methodology

After considering different approaches to redesign it was noted that the initial approach followed the socially critical approach as described by Toohey (1999), which shares ideas and perspectives with the module: to encourage students to analyse mainstream views that maintain and support the status quo and to understand that the institutions of society are created and moulded by social elites (Fox, Prilleltensky & Austin, 2009). I was interested in discovering how far it is already being applied and ways it could be further implemented or improved upon.

In addition, Kirkpatrick's model of learning evaluation was utilised, through mid-term feedback from students, as suggested by Diamond (2004), to evaluate students' development and engagement. In order to gain a fully comprehensive picture of the module, further sources and methods of data collection were: student attendance and module results, third party questionnaire, my own reflective diary, feedback from colleagues and QAA guidelines. Student feedback was collected verbally as well as in written format to allow anonymity. Data was analysed and interpreted using appropriate techniques. Due to space limitations not all data analysed will be discussed here, but for further details please contact the author directly.

Results

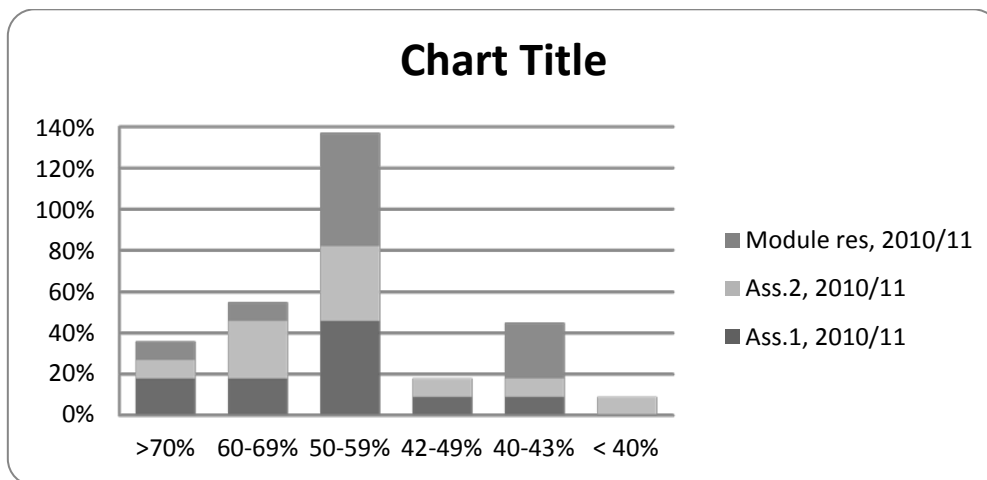
Module Results



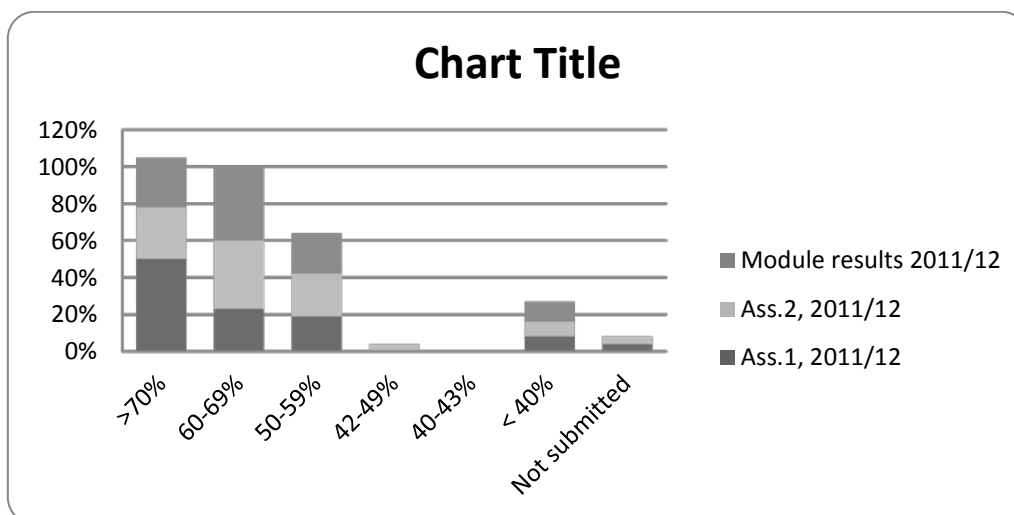
Graph 1: Marks achieved for assignment 1 and 2 plus on the overall module

The pass rate in 2011/12 on the module was 90% on first attempt, which was lower than the previous year of 100%.

Considering the relationship between attendance figures and results it shows a good correlation of 0.64, which suggests students who attended, had a good chance of passing.



Graph 2 - Results in % for year 2010/11



Graph 3 - Results in % for year 2011/12

As can be seen from the graphs above, students that submitted received a much higher grade in year 2011/12 than in the year prior in both assignments and consequently also in the overall module result. It is suggested that these results are not due to the generosity of the first marker, but instead supported by a second objective perspective from the feedback of the colleague, who was second marking (see analysis below); additionally all marks were confirmed and supported by the external examiner as per university's requirements.

Mid-Term Student Feedback

As per the suggestions by Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation mid-term feedback was sought from students to gain insights into their understanding and engagement of the new content. Overall students seemed happy with the content, but would have

preferred to be shown more videos and case studies. Subsequent sessions incorporated these suggestions.

Furthermore in order to make sure the evaluation was participatory as per the chosen model above (Moore, 2003), students were asked not just for their opinion on improvement, but also on suggested material and videos that they had come across during their research and thought were applicable and useful. This approach encouraged students' participation, engagement was very well received, and students became co-constructors of their experience at university.

Colleague's Feedback

Her comments about the assignments for years 2011/12 were that it was apparent that students clearly understood the meaning of critical perspectives, the different approaches and their application, and that especially compared to the year before standards of engagement and writing had clearly increased.

Discussion

The attendance figures could have been higher, but based on personal experience from other modules attendance can be fairly low in level 6 cohorts due to work and family commitments. It is always easier to engage students that attend, but it is much harder to engage students that lack contact. One way of overcoming this could be the completion of an online quiz before students are able to download their lecture slides; this is one feature that will be investigated further once the new virtual learning environment is in use from September 2012.

Regarding the different forms of feedback collected during the term it was encouraging but equally provided some suggestions for improvements. Students advised more than once that they liked to watch videos. This request was responded to in the subsequent sessions followed with a small group discussion. Additionally in order to acknowledge and utilise suggestions made by students, some of the videos were actually recommended by students and hence were very well received. Other material that was recommended by students was incorporated into the sessions and therefore provided students further opportunities to participate and co-create the experience in the classroom, as suggested in the social critical approach (Toohey, 1999). Due to the diverse cohort on this module the social critical approach was the right one to use. Students embraced the understanding of historical, social, economic and political frameworks and actively worked on the comprehension of their own reality. This approach seemed very well received and will be upheld should this module run again.

Considering the colleague's feedback it was good to receive another professional opinion on the progress of the module and provided a good sounding board for new ideas.

Conclusion

As Moore (*op cit*) suggests, evaluation should be considered an integral part of teaching practice, and this is one of the main reasons why the module was evaluated in the first place. It was also evaluated as an on-going process: at several stages students were asked to provide feedback, which was then reflected on and integrated into the design of the module. Evaluation was participatory, as again students gave feedback and suggestions as to the material to be used, and peers provided feedback as to the usefulness of the material. Modifications were made throughout the term taking feedback into consideration, and each teaching session was judged and reflected upon, drawing out wider implications.

The overall requirement of the module as per the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2007) is to provide Psychology students with the opportunity to critically evaluate mainstream ideas. It enables them to present multiple perspectives in a way that fosters critical evaluation. Following on from the results of this study, it is believed that the module does this very well and by doing so will equip students for their future careers in management, psychology or human resources.

Recommendations for future runs of this module:-

- Keep the diversity of perspectives as before; however, investigate a different form of delivery as mentioned above. Rather than teaching the fundamentals of the different perspectives, get students to explore the areas with guided questions, case studies and guidelines as suggested by Joham & Clarke (2012).
- Keep students involved and encourage their individual research into the topics discussed. Incorporate their findings and encourage small group work and debate.
- Continue checking attendance figures during the term and contact non attending students if necessary.
- Provide opportunities for feedback on draft reports and continue to encourage students' individual critical thinking.

As part of the limitations of this study it can be suggested that the results are based on a rather small student cohort. However, that the small class size also meant that the adopted format of teaching is especially applicable. Although this module might never be repeated, lessons learned from this evaluation will be utilised on future critical perspectives modules.

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