

Part A

Learning from failure: Why did summative assessment fail to motivate student learning?

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Excellence in learning and teaching requires continual reflection and a readiness 'to change views in the light of new information' (Brew, 2003, 14). Unsatisfactory outcomes offer an opportunity to acknowledge and learn from the things that don't work out as planned. This paper focuses on a failure that challenged some basic tenets of my teaching and learning regime (see Trowler and Cooper, 2002).

The assumptions that were challenged were that learning could be effectively achieved through empowering students as self-teaching agents encouraged by self-assessed formative tasks and motivated by a final summative assessment. These assumptions were founded in the literature and seemed validated by a successful attempt to combine student focused learning with summative assessment to encourage students to take responsibility for acquiring basic knowledge in an introductory politics subject for communications students (POL101). This success led to a more ambitious application of the same principles to the learning of grammar, spelling and punctuation in an introductory communications subject for policing students (JST107). The second application failed in as much as in the summative assessment, half the students did not demonstrate the acquisition of the required knowledge at the specified level. The students in JST107 were surveyed to turn the failure of the approach into a learning experience. The results of the survey challenged a number of the tenets that were embedded in of my teaching and learning regime.