The Professional Practice of Tertiary Teaching

PROF532-15C – Task 1:

Assessment Initiative

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Abstract:

In this research initiative I will investigate the use of Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert as a method of teaching/learning as an effective approach to create assessment in a tertiary interior design context. I will explore the use of Mantle of the Expert through the changes I plan to make to Assignment 1 of the first year (level 5) Interior Design Studies paper on the Diploma of Interior Design at the Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec). This paper is taught over a full year, with four assignments throughout the year. Assignment 1 is worth 15%, making it the smallest assignment of the year. This year the assignment I plan for the students to undertake involves each of the 12 students enrolled in the paper working on design proposals for simulated owner-occupied apartments. Using a Mantle of the Expert approach in the teaching/learning, students will work in groups of 3, switching between the roles of designer, client and a partner/friend of the client. Although working in small groups, they will work separately on their design proposals as they move through three short projects, each mimicking a different stage of the design process, culminating in the final presentation of their project. This process will give opportunities for students to receive multiple forms of feedback throughout the process from many different sources. The aim of this process in relation to the students is to build their assessment literacy and knowledge of the design process. The aim of the process in relation to the course content is that it creates constructive alignment between the graduate profile, learning outcomes, teaching/learning techniques and the assessment tasks. Through creating a safe environment that allows a student to role-play/practice in the world of ‘as if’ in assignment 1, the hope is that they will work toward building their industry preparedness in the world of ‘as is’.

Research Question: How does using a Mantle of the Expert approach prepare students for working with a real client?
Theoretical Framework:

Upon entering the first year of studying interior design at a tertiary level, my students come to me excited, nervous and unsure of what to expect. To help students find direction feedback plays an important role. Carless discusses the importance of timely feedback in his writing as a prompt for student engagement in their work and action moving forward (2007). Nicol goes further to stress the importance of students building understanding of what is required by them through a combination of regular feedback on their progress, while still empowering them to develop ownership over their own learning (2009, p. 6). This leads me to the area of Assessment literacy, which is an important area for students to develop, as it helps them to understand what is required of them, how they can meet these requirements and learn to judge their work against pre-set requirements (Smith, Worsfold, Davies, Fisher, & McPhail, 2013).

My key aims for assignment 1, which I will elaborate on further in this essay are that it can act as both an introduction to assessment at a tertiary institute and an introduction to the design process. I aim to improve assessment literacy in students in multiple ways, the first is by breaking the assignment up into three parts, providing three opportunities within the structure of the assignment for students to describe and critique their own work and receive graded feedback on it. The graded feedback will take the form of a combination of written and oral feedback given in relation to set criteria at three specific points the project. These moments of graded feedback will allow moments of reflection that will help enrich the next stages of the project, giving a formative quality to the graded assessments. Taras states that formative feedback is similar to graded feedback in that the work is judged against a set of guidelines, however after formative feedback there is an opportunity to rectify any discrepancies before the final moment of judgement of a project (2005). I also plan to create opportunities for students to work on their assignments in class between weeks where they are presenting their work, receiving formative feedback on their progress. I will also take
opportunities at these points of graded and formative feedback to allow self-assessment to take place. Students will be provided with a marking rubric, which is a detailed list of the grading criteria with written information about what each grade means, then give themselves a grade. This will help them develop their understanding of the grading criteria, and a chance to check up on their own progress (Andrade, 2008). This approach also allows for a shared approach to assessing where some power is returned to the student as importance is returned to the perceptions that students hold of their own work, rather than them seeing the only important opinion being that of the teacher (Boud, 1995). I will also give opportunities for peer assessment over the course of the project, which Nicol (2010) argues is equally as important as teacher feedback, as it gives opportunities to receive comments from many different sources, offering a richness and volume that the comments of a single teacher would struggle to match. Nicol also states that the process of producing feedback is beneficial to students as it is cognitively more demanding than just receiving it (2010, p. 514). Boud, Hawke & Fachikov add to this the concept of Sustainable Assessment as way of promoting lifelong learning. Rather than just assessing skills practised in the classroom that may become outdated or may be forgotten after the completion of the project, allowing for flexible outcomes and multiple forms of feedback and assessment gives students the opportunity to learn ways to work through future tasks in and outside of the institution (2008). The combination of these different forms of assessment and feedback should contribute to a high level of assessment literacy and a greater level of Sustainability in this assignment.

In developing this assessment task, it is also very important to me that I apply the principle of constructive alignment. Biggs states that in constructive alignment, the learning outcomes, teaching/learning activities and assessment tasks are directly aligned, as opposed to some other forms of alignment wherein the teaching/learning activities may not be directly involved (2003, p. 99). I believe that in considering the teaching/learning as an integral part of the assessment task through the use of a Mantle approach, I will achieve constructive alignment in this assessment task.
A Mantle of the Expert (Mantle) approach to education involves putting students at the centre of their learning, with each student playing an important role within a fictionally constructed company working together toward an equally fictional commission (Heathcote & Bolton, 1994). In a tertiary interior design context, this will be a design company and each student will be Expert-Framed as a practicing interior designer who is a member of this company, with the students having the ability through Drama for Learning to switch between the role of designer and client. According to Aitken (2013), it is necessary for teachers planning to teach using a Mantle approach to be knowledgeable in and ready to use a combination of Inquiry Learning, Expert Framing and Drama for Learning in their teaching (see Figure 1). Inquiry learning involves the teacher as a facilitator of learning, posing questions for the students to find their own answers for, discovering learning in their own way (Spronken-Smith & Walker, 2010). In the case of interior design studies, students will not be provided with a set of design rules, they will be provided with the ability to interview their client and well written assessment tasks that give them opportunities to discover information for themselves. Like Inquiry learning, Aitken (2013) states that Expert Framing is also a student-centred approach with the teacher as facilitator of learning, with the addition of the students being framed as qualified experts in their field. This involves building belief in a fictional company they are working in, and can be assisted by the use of Drama for Learning (Aitken, 2013). Andersen discusses Drama for learning as a student-centred approach to teaching/learning that does not involve creating a stage show with actors and
an audience. Instead, it involves a constant shifting of improvised roles in the classroom. This process leads students to further comprehend the person they’re in the role of and gives them an opportunity to try things out in the ‘as if’ (see Figure 2) world that they may not otherwise have the chance to try in the ‘as is’ world (Andersen, 2004)(Edmiston, 2003). Boud & Falchikov discuss the importance of authenticity of assessment tasks, and make mention of the fact that while we can get close to creating authenticity in many forms of assessment, they are still taking place in the ‘as-if’ world of a tertiary institute (2007, p. 66). This confirms for me that just creating an assessment task that is similar to one taken on in industry today may not create true authenticity, and the recognition of the use of Drama for Learning in my planned assessment task may work well to build another level of authenticity and engagement in the task for the students.

**Aims of the planned assignment task:**

As Interior Design Studies is a module taught at the Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec), it comes with a module descriptor that includes a set of learning outcomes that are firmly in place and cannot be easily changed by the tutor. If the need for change is great enough, a proposal for change can be put forward to a programme committee for discussion. However I believe that the current learning outcomes for this paper are specific enough to demonstrate clearly the intended outcomes of the course, while still being flexible enough to allow for creativity in the method of assessment. This flexibility will help in the sustainability of this assessment task, as it can move and evolve with the changing needs of the students and the wider design industry (Boud et al., 2008). I will begin by explaining the learning outcomes I have chosen to assess for this assignment and the ways in which they have been addressed in the planned assessment tasks.

The graduate profile for a student by the end of their interior design diploma at Wintec is as follows:

A graduate of the Diploma in Interior Design (Level 6) will have acquired specialised knowledge and skills in interior design and will have:
The ability to think critically, and to apply skills and knowledge to professional practice in the interior design industry.

A range of strategies for researching and using information in an interior design context.

Developed the interpersonal attributes and skills in co-operation, collaboration and participation necessary for careers in interior design.

Developed an understanding of the social, economic, cultural and political environments in which interior design activities are undertaken.

The ability to anticipate and respond to emerging changes in the interior design domain.

An understanding of and the ability to respond to the expectations of professional practice in the interior design industry.

As I teach this paper and many of the others across the two years of the diploma, it is important that I know the graduate profile well and that I use it to help me build key aims that I carry through each assignment. I try to meet these aims in accordance with every point listed under the graduate profile at every stage of the diploma, regardless of the level or content of the paper. My key aims for the assignment led me to work with the following outcomes from the module descriptor for the planned assessment task:

**L.O. 2.1 – Use a process which advances the structured and reflective refinement of a design problem**

- Identify the problems and issues set in the course brief
- Complete self-directed research and reflect upon working processes
- Demonstrate the structured resolution of a process through the generation, regeneration, manipulation, and refinement of ideas
- Discuss with peers and tutors the individual working process adopted
- Show evidence of independent and interdependent processes for working

**L.O. 2.2 – Formulate schematic design proposals and mood boards**

- Explore design concepts generated through two-dimensional and three-dimensional sketch drawing
- Create mood boards featuring visual imagery of design inspirations referencing a chosen design direction as an initial design approach to a project
- Write and undertake a client questionnaire aimed at documenting the clients requirements for the interior design project

**L.O. 2.8 – Comprehend the process of a graded assignment**

- Employ a vocabulary for describing work
- Write objectives
- Actively participate in group and class critiques
- Consider and reflect upon self and peer design processes and decisions
- Participate in ongoing formative assessment
- Consider, discuss, and document self and peer performances for graded assessment
Learning outcome 2.1 asks the students to work through the design process in a way with is very much in line with industry standard, and is an outcome that appears in every design project the students undertake for their time studying on the Interior Design diploma. Learning outcome 2.2 asks the students to create certain documentation of this process, including sketching, mood boards and a client questionnaire. Learning outcome 2.8 is a generic outcome across the School of Media Arts at Wintec that discusses the ability of each student to recognise the process of graded assessment, including participating in describing their work, critiquing their work and the work of their classmates, reflection on their design process, formative feedback, and self and peer assessment.

**Description of the planned assignment task:**

Based on the learning outcomes stated above, my first decision is to break the assignment into three parts, each part receiving a grade and formative feedback. This is in line with learning outcome 2.8, which discusses building comprehension of the assessment grading process. This also gives them an opportunity to fail one part of the assessment task without failing the whole assignment. The module descriptor states that to pass the Interior Design Studies module, students must pass all assessment tasks and if they fail one assignment they will not be permitted to continue in this module. Breaking assignment 1 into three points of graded assessment gives an opportunity for the students to become unafraid of assessment (Boud & Falchikov, 2007, p. 37), as although each part receives a grade that cannot be changed, the process is formative because the students have the opportunity to learn from the first part and improve on subsequent performance without the fear of failing the whole module.

Breaking the assignment into three parts also will allow the students the chance to move through the design process step by step. I plan to break these steps down in the order they take place in industry (fed by both my own industry experience and backed up by yearly employer engagement group meetings with industry representatives). This alignment with the interior design industry will aid in building the authenticity of the assignment, the
industry preparedness of the students, while also lining up with learning outcomes 2.1 & 2.2.

**Assignment 1, part 1 (proposed):**

The first part of the proposed assignment requires students to undertake the initial stages of the design process by interviewing a client. They start by receiving a letter from HR with some blank areas – the client name, occupation, who they live with, and three general mood related words that give an initial idea of what the client would like to create in their home. They will also receive the floor plan and a 3D drawing of the empty apartment. The students then create a client questionnaire, which they use to interview their client. Drama for Learning is used in this classroom activity, as the students will be put in groups of three to act as client for each other. The results of this interview then lead students to the creation of their client brief (starting from a provided template) and visual research into their client needs (using Pinterest.com as an online pin board to capture their visual research). They will then present this back to the class framed as an office full of designers (their client will be asked to ‘stay home' for this presentation) for peer feedback.

**Assignment 1, part 2 (proposed):**

The second part of the proposed assessment requires students to edit and add to their visual research to create a digital mood board and to start a sketchbook playing with different possibilities for floor plan layout, furnishings etc. This will lead to an interim client meeting with the same student who acted as their client for the interview returning for an informal meeting. In this meeting, the designer shows the client their ideas for the project in order to receive interim feedback. Each designer will receive a client satisfaction form from their client and their client's partner/friend.

**Assignment 1, part 3 (proposed):**
The third and final part of the proposed assessment requires students to formalise their ideas for the project based on the client feedback from their previous meeting by creating a formal presentation that includes drawings and found imagery to show their design direction. They will present these on a large screen to the rest of the class including their client, receiving feedback from their client, classmates and teacher at the end of their presentation.

**Assignment 1, general information (proposed):**

Each assessment task will take place over two weeks with time given in class to work in a studio environment. The time spent in class on their assignment gives a chance for formative assessment to take place with their tutor, and for the students to work together and give peer feedback throughout the project. After each of the three parts of the assessment, I will hand out copies of the marking schedule to each student and ask them to self-assess, giving them the cues ‘what went well?’ and ‘what did you learn that you can move forward with?’ This gives them the chance to reflect on both their learning and the assessment criteria and grading process as they go. Each part of the assessment will be handed out after the previous part has been completed, in order for the students to concentrate on each valuable and equally important part of the design process, without rushing forward to the end of the project too quickly.

Below I will provide a summary of the key components which I believe will make this a successful assignment, as discussed in the introduction and demonstrated in the proposed assessment task:

Mantle of the expert:

- **Expert Framing** – the students will be framed as practicing designers, and will put to the test when meeting with their client.
- **Drama for Learning** – the students will be shifting roles within the classroom between the worlds of ‘as-if’ and ‘as-is’, from being a designer to being a client, to being the partner/friend of their client, then returning to being a student again.
Inquiry Learning – students each have a different client with different needs, and in order to meet those needs, they need to go out and do their own research into those needs.

Feedback:

- Formative feedback – students will have the chance to receive formative feedback when working on their assessment task in a studio-based class environment.
- Graded feedback – students will be provided with three opportunities to receive timely graded feedback throughout this assessment task.
- Self-assessment – students will be provided with the opportunities to self-assess at each point of graded feedback.
- Peer-assessment – this will take place both formatively in the studio-based classroom environments and presentation contexts.

Assessment principles:

- Alignment – assessment task is aligned with graduate profile, learning outcomes and industry-based feedback.
- Authenticity – requirements for assessment task are based on current industry standards, and the use of a drama-based client, along with the fact that each student will be working on a project for a different client will help to build authenticity in this task.
- Sustainable assessment – the ability work through an Inquiry-based approach, to give feedback to their peers, and to self-assess will aide in the improved ability for life-long learning resulting from this assessment task, leading students into a more independent way of responding to the requirements of a client, rather than just a ticking of boxes based on assessment outcomes.

Evaluation of assessment task:

At the start of this project, the students were a very quiet group, extremely shy and waiting for teacher prompts to act. On their first day, they sat in a circle and waited for me to enter the room for them to even introduce themselves to each other. I spent the majority of their first session building the values of the group, and building their ability to move between the worlds of ‘as-if’ and ‘as-
is’. By the end of the 7-week assessment task, the group dynamic has changed considerably. They are now a group who laugh together and who critiqued each other’s work in a careful, precise and fun way. I will give a brief description of each week below:

Week 1:
We played drama games related to interior design in order to build a fictional design company with strong group values, and at the end of the day in small groups the students presented the work of past students to build their understanding of expectations and their skills in peer assessment and feedback. This was a difficult day as the students were very quiet and unresponsive, they did however manage to take on all tasks and complete to a high standard.

Week 2:
The students presented personal mood boards to the group that showed visually who they were and what they valued. They then received the brief for assignment 1, including their client profile and started writing questions. A key element of Mantle is the drama convention of a key tension – this was achieved through the information that their client was coming in in fifteen minutes and they needed to be ready for them! They then raced through their questionnaires, receiving peer feedback from the students around them as they did. They were then put in their groups and told that drama would form a part of their process, so they got into their groups and started to get to know their clients. This was very funny, and the tension in the room started to dissipate. The final hour of the class was spent working on writing up a design brief for their project and starting to gather visual research on Pinterest.com, receiving formative feedback from their peers and their teacher.

Week 3:
This week the students presented their findings in Pinterest.com to their classmates, framed as a company meeting where the clients were kindly asked to stay at home. After each student presented their Pinterest board to the group the group were encouraged to ask questions or comment on what they had seen. All students were given the opportunity to give at least two
pieces of feedback. Following this presentation they were given a blank copy of the marking rubric, and asked to grade themselves and answer the questions – ‘what went well?’ & “what did I learn through this process?” This was great as it led to lots of lively class discussion about things the students had forgotten to do, and led to them making decisions about what they would do differently in future. They were then given the brief for the next stage of the project (mood board + sketch book of ideas), and the final hour of class to work on these, gaining formative feedback as they went.

Week 4:
This week the students took a class trip to Auckland for a design inspiration/product sourcing trip – this led to lots of opportunities for formative feedback while the students worked on sketches for their projects, and for the students to experience an authentic part of contemporary design practice – getting out and seeing products/ finding inspiration.

Week 5:
This week the students presented to their clients and received feedback via a client satisfaction form. These presentations were funny and relaxed, but the language the students were using was professional, accurate and the work they showed was of an extremely high level – the value that they were showing their clients was unlike anything I had seen before at this stage of a project. The students were then given another opportunity to self-assess, it was clear between this and the last time they had had this opportunity that they had a much better appreciation of what was expected of them for this part of the assignment, despite the much higher complexity of the requirements. The students then received the brief for the third part of their assignment, and immediately asked very insightful, interesting questions displaying that their assessment literacy had been raised considerably. They then had time to work on their assignments in class, again receiving formative feedback from peers and their teacher.

Week 6:
This week I had a guest come in from industry to go around and give formative feedback to each of the students while they worked in a studio
environment. This was an incredibly exciting day, as each of the students had a breakthrough on their projects, and the studio environment was clearly working well because for the first time, the students were interacting without any prompts to do so, and the environment was far more relaxed, yet productive than it had been before.

**Week 7:**
This week was the final week of the project, and the final student presentation. The students came in 30 minutes early to prepare their presentations, and a senior member of teaching staff and the same industry guest came along to give feedback after each of the presentations. Many of the presentations were better than many I had seen at the end of a first year class, and the level of care, attention and professionalism that each student had imbued in their presentation was incredibly impressive. The clients gave great feedback to their designers after the presentation, as did the rest of the class and the guests to the presentation. In their self-assessments the students gave themselves very precise and accurate feedback, and were very confident in the grades they felt they had achieved, which were in the most part extremely accurate, if a little harsh. We reflected on the process and did a visualisation activity where we closed our eyes and imagined the clients arriving home, putting down their coat, making themselves a cup of tea, sitting down somewhere, then we wished them luck, said goodbye to them and closed the door.

I believe that this assessment task empowered the students to find their inner designer through the three distinct stages of the task, each scaffolding them toward a greater knowledge of the design process. They did this through the combination of Expert Framing, Inquiry Learning and Drama for Learning that a Mantle of the Expert approach combines. This was aided through the testing of appropriate learning outcomes in a combination of authentic classroom and assessment activities which met the needs of current industry practice and the student abilities, while allowing plenty of opportunity for timely feedback in many different forms, be it formative/ graded, self/ peer.

**Conclusion:**
In conclusion, I believe that my assessment task was a complete success, as it managed to give the students an enjoyable, student-centred exercise for learning both in and outside the classroom, as evidenced in the complete turnaround in the classroom environment from being quiet and unsure to being confident and jovial. There was also evidence that this has been a successful task in that the work created is by far the best work created for assignment 1 in my four years of teaching this module, and that if this level of work continues from these students, their industry preparedness will be more highly developed than any student I have seen graduate from this course. My hope is that the students will be prepared to use what they have learned from assignment 1 to continue acting in a professional and self-directed way armed with their sense of assessment literacy, their ability to use design language and basic skills in putting together a client proposal. If this is the case, then these students will take be demonstrating that this assessment task has taken them a step in the direction toward being a group of lifelong learners.

**Reference list:**


