

LAMS for Inquiry-based Learning Case Studies

Reflective Writing in Teaching French



1. *The students and the curriculum*
2. *The teaching and learning aims*
3. *The inquiry/ inquiries*
4. *What happened (the process)*
5. *Reflections*
6. *Any other comments*

1. *The students and the curriculum*

This learning design consists of two short LAMS activity sequences that were created for a group of twelve second year Modern Languages students.

2. *The teaching and learning aims*

The two key factors which prompted the tutor to re-assess the original design were: the critical reflective skills deficit in students' previous assignments; and, the value of students gaining an opportunity to learn from each other without the tutor's involvement. The tutor wanted to provide a framework for peer learning and the development of professional attitudes and skills. She wanted to use an online activity because of time constraints on face-to-face activity, and considered that this would offer a means of enabling all students to 'have an equal voice' in peer interactions.

The activity sequences are intended

- to engage students with the concept and practice of reflective writing (as related to students' experiences of teaching practice in schools)
- to encourage collaboration, resource-sharing and the development of personal voice.

Key outcomes envisaged were that students should :

- Feel comfortable with critical reflective writing;
- Build collaborative relationships with peers;
- Think about learning in a different way;
- Develop key skills through experience, in a short time-frame.

3. *The inquiry/ inquiries*

The learning design was created specifically to support students in their work towards an assessed task which involved the production of individual reflective portfolios. The activity was inquiry-based, in that students were encouraged to inquire into their own practice and development as learners and teachers of a modern language (experiential inquiry). The inquiry was set up within clear parameters established by the tutor.

4. *What happened (the process)*

The LAMS tools used were:

- (1) **Noticeboard**: a 'welcome to the activity' noticeboard provided a detailed overview of the activity and a brief review of what students had covered in the classroom the previous week.
- (2) **Noticeboard**: the tutor provided some principles and groundrules for constructive, collaborative activity in the online forum.
- (3) **Noticeboard**: the tutor provided her own reflective review of the previous week's face-to-face class. This was offered as a point of departure for stimulating and supporting student-teachers' own reflections on their teaching experiences.

(4) **Forum:** all students were asked to respond to the tutor's reflective piece, and then to each choose one other student's response to respond to in turn, thereby creating a starting-point for online discussion that ran for two weeks in parallel with students' experiences of teaching practice in the school classroom.

(5) **Noticeboard:** a second short sequence began with instructions about the second task (finding and sharing resources on learning styles).

(6) **Resources and Forum:** students searched for relevant resources on learning styles to include in their assessed portfolios. They were asked to comment on resources within the forum and evaluate one resource (either their own or one discovered by a peer) as part of their assessed portfolio. As a starting point, a set of resources were provided, covering a range of different types of resource: a quiz on learning styles, websites on specific approaches to language learning, for example.

(7) **Share resources:** students were asked to build a common pool of resources on learning styles. Using the resources provided as a guide to the kind of materials that might be available, students were asked to contribute materials they had found online and to write a brief description of them for use by their peers.

5. Reflections

The tutor indicated that she considered her pedagogical objectives had been achieved. Students appeared to have become more autonomous in terms of finding information resources and had collaborated on building a pool of resources. The students established more collaborative styles of working than might be expected of a typical group of second year students, gelling well together as a group. The students demonstrated better reflective writing in their portfolios; one interesting development was the use by one pair of a social networking tool to carry out a peer reflection online rather than face to face. The quality of the dialogue, which was not carried out in real time, was high, showing good understanding of reflective practice.

The tutor noted that running the activity in LAMS was useful because the learning design is made very obvious to students by the system, rather than hidden from them - this was especially relevant in the context of their learning about teaching as a process.

She felt the design had successfully provided a structured framework in which to move students through a number of steps in a logical sequence, require them to produce input, and support assessed activity:

"It provides a fairly quick and easy way to produce good learning sequences that on the whole are easy for students to use and get them engaged in something collaborative. I used it outside the classroom and it works very well in providing support materials".

Students' feedback highlighted the access they gained to useful resources, the way in which sharing of information and discussion between students was facilitated, the value of the private notepad function, the ease of manipulation of digital files, and the positive impact on learning (e.g. the comment that seeing other people's opinions helped to form your own). Quantitative feedback from ten students included:

7 agreed that they found the activity stimulating and useful;

7 agreed that they found the activity effective in helping them to learn about their subject;

9 agreed that the activity had involved them in a new way of learning;

9 agreed that the activity had helped them carry out some useful research/exploration;

The lecturer's willingness to share her own reflection on a previous session she had facilitated with the same students was both a risk and a success factor, in that it allowed students to engage with their tutor's pedagogical thinking at a level not previously invited. A thoughtful approach helped to create an environment where risk-taking and openness among students was encouraged. The tutor actively invited feedback from students, thus becoming a co-inquirer in the task.

The learning outcomes were achieved and the students felt comfortable with their critical reflective writing. There was evidence of this skill in their submitted reflective portfolios. The students also collaborated and

discussed in the online forum, thereby learning from each other as they discussed the tutor's reflective piece in the sequence. The model of the lecturer as co-inquirer was shown to be a useful one, helping to create a 'safe' environment by encouraging honest writing; the safety of the environment may also have been aided by the discussion being online rather than face-to-face. In order to help this task, ground rules were established for discussions online. The activity also empowered the students to become more autonomous in terms of taking responsibility for their learning, including in locating and evaluating information resources for the module.

6. <i>Any other comments</i>

Clarity in terms of desired learning outcomes is essential. The tutor advised against using technology for the sake of technology because students need to understand how using the technology or doing the activities fits with the learning outcomes.