USING CONSENSUS MODERATION TO ENSURE APPROPRIATE ACADEMIC STANDARDS WHEN MARKING

A Case Study by Katie Weir and Peter Grainger
School of Education and Professional Studies
Griffith University

Introduction

A consensus moderation process for marking student assessments was introduced into 4020EBL/EPS, a course delivered across multiple campuses. The moderation process included a face to face moderation meeting between all tutors and convenors where representative samples of student work were discussed to 'calibrate' tutors before the tutors commenced marking their separate classes' work within the group setting.

Context

4020EBL Responsive Assessment in Context is taught to approximately 380 Fourth year students of the Bachelor of Education, Primary as part of their final year studies. The course is taught on three campuses. Dr. Katie Weir convenes the course from the Gold Coast campus while Dr. Peter Grainger is the campus convenor at Mount Gravatt and Logan campuses. Four sessional staff are employed across the three campuses.

There are three assessment items in the course and this case study describes the consensus moderation process for marking applied to the written exam. In the exam, students are given a task description for which they were required to develop an appropriate assessment rubric.

Katie and I collaborated around the delivery of the course curriculum, the design of the assessment tasks, the criteria for marking and the expected standards of student work. This was to ensure we had a shared understanding about the course requirements and expectations and that we could deliver a consistent message regarding the same to all students undertaking 4020 and to the sessional staff teaching in the course.

Consensus Moderation of Marking

The process for moderating the exam marking process is outlined as follows:

Tutor Moderation of Marking Meeting

- I called a moderation meeting shortly after students completed their exam, at which all 6 markers from across campuses (2 convenors + 4 tutors) attended
- We each brought with us the exams from our own tutorial classes (9 classes totalling 380 student exams)
- I prepared for the meeting by marking 10 exams across a range of levels from my own tutorial class; to act as benchmarks for discussion and calibration
I also ensured we had copies of the Criteria Sheet and Indicative A Response (detailed information on what a top “A” student’s work should look like; developed as we had no prior copies of actual students’ work)

As a group we discussed the Criteria Sheet, and Indicative A Response and went through the 10 exams I had previously marked

The purpose was for everyone to understand and agree to mark the same way, to the same level

Once this was agreed upon – each of us then marked our own tutorial groups’ exams in this group setting for a further 2 hours

This group set up for marking allowed for discussion in situ for any difficult or borderline questions – and agreement as a group as to how this would be marked

The course convenors, as the academic leads did have the final decision

After this 2 hours, each tutor had a representative sample of work which myself and my co convenor reviewed to ensure consistency of marking

Any discrepancies or inconsistencies were discussed

This moderation of marking meeting took approximately 3 hours

Each of us then went away to complete our allocation of marking and tutors returned their marked exams to their respective campus convenors.

[Note that each tutor was paid for 1 hour of moderation in addition to their marking time.]

**Moderation of Fails**

- My co convenor and I swapped and moderated all of the students exam that had received a failing grade
- We utilised the Griffith internal mail system to facilitate this process

**What’s Good about this Practice**

Bringing marked exams across a range of levels, to illustrate what we as course convenors were looking for; aided and facilitated the calibration process with the tutors.

The group setting for the initial marking of exams was an effective forum in which questions and issues could be raised, discussed and agreement reached. Tutors left the meeting much better prepared to apply a consistent approach on their own.

We feel that it is important to moderate any student receiving a failing grade, to ensure equitable and fair assessment of their performance.

**Critical Success Factors**

The process works more effectively with tutors who have either been involved in some form of consensus moderation previously; or are at least open and positive about it.

A ‘rogue’ tutor who agrees in principle … and then marks their own way regardless; can create significant extra workload, if remarking is required.

The attendance of all markers at the initial moderation of marking meeting is critical for the initial calibration; and to identify early any discrepancies in marking approaches and interpretation of marking criteria and standards.