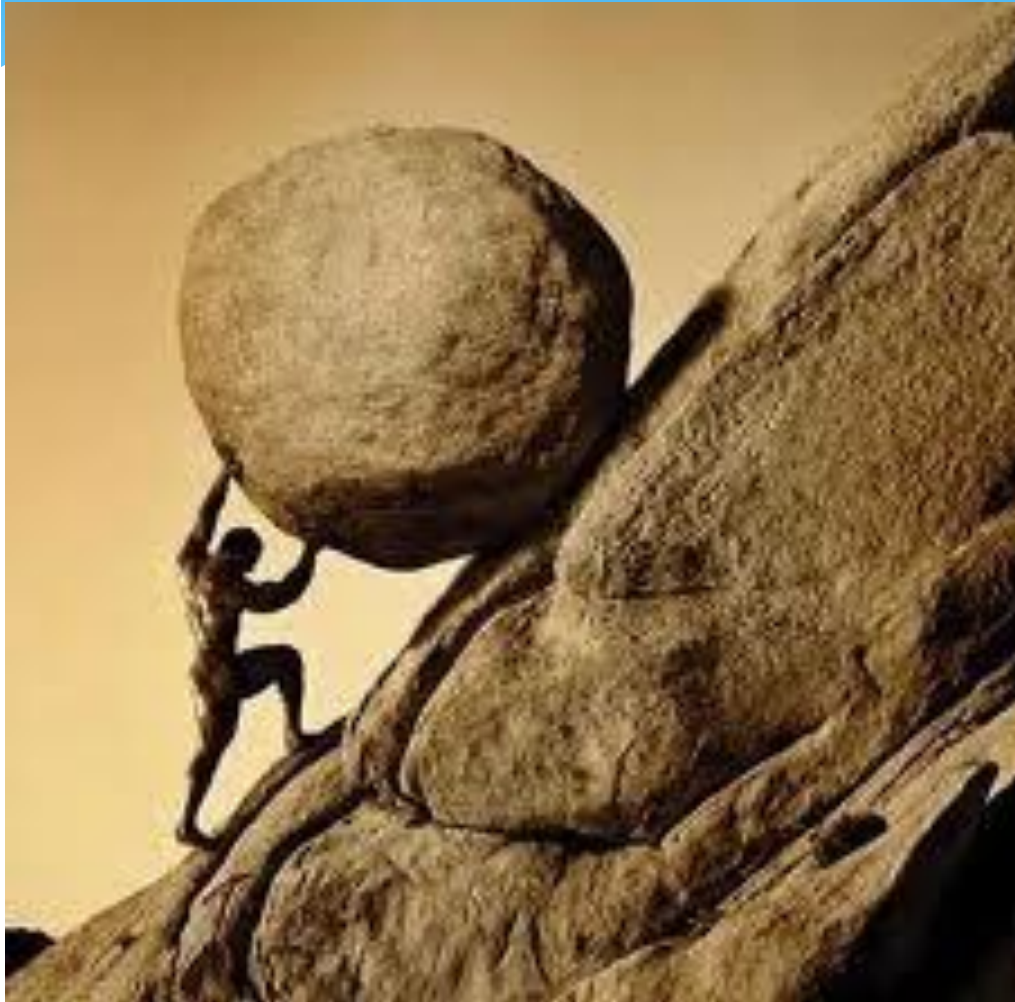


Dispelling myths about assessment and feedback: evidence from TESTA (2009-2014)

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HEPN University of Sheffield, 8 December 2014

Myths about assessment and feedback



Sisyphus rolls a boulder up a hill

“an eternity of endless labour, useless effort and frustration”

Homer, 8th Century BC

21st century equivalent



“You end up assessing for assessment’s sake rather than thinking about what the assessment is for...”

Programme Leader, Winchester
(2008)

Three TESTA premises

- 1) Assessment drives what students pay attention to, and defines the actual curriculum (Ramsden 1992).
- 2) Feedback is significant (Hattie, 2009; Black and Wiliam, 1998)
- 3) Programme is central to influencing change.

What is TESTA?

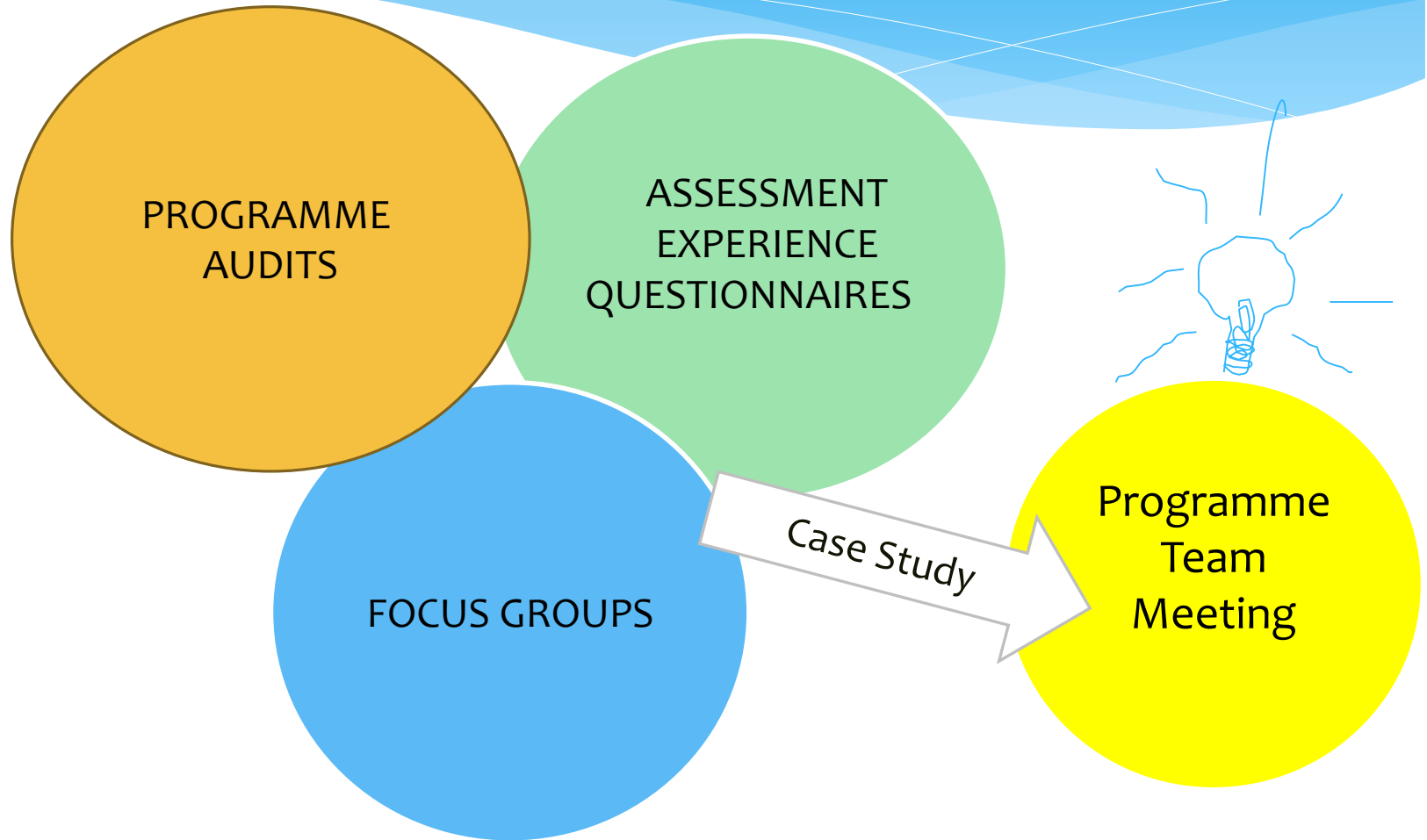
Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment

- * 200k HEA funded research project (2009-12)
- * 7 programmes in 4 'Cathedrals Group' universities
- * Evidence-based research and change process
- * Assessment through a programme lens
- * Based on assessment principles

A word cloud of university names on a black background. The names are in various colors (green, blue, white, yellow) and sizes. The largest words are 'Durham', 'Winchester', 'Birmingham', 'New South Wales', 'Worcester', and 'UCL'. Other visible names include 'Coventry', 'Bath Spa', 'Liverpool John Moore', 'Edinburgh Napier', 'Saurashtra Metropolitan', 'Nottingham', 'Southampton Solent', 'Glasgow', 'Sheffield Hallam', 'University of West Scotland', 'Oxford Brookes', 'Queen Mary', 'Roehampton', 'Robert Gordon', 'Greenwich', 'Kent', 'Delhi', 'Essex', 'London Metropolitan', 'Exeter', 'Dundee', 'Keele', 'Chichester', 'Southampton', 'Canterbury Christchurch', 'Edge Hill', 'Winchester', 'Birmingham', 'New South Wales', 'Durham', 'Coventry', 'Bath Spa', 'Liverpool John Moore', 'Edinburgh Napier', 'Saurashtra Metropolitan', 'Nottingham', 'Southampton Solent', 'Glasgow', 'Sheffield Hallam', 'University of West Scotland', 'Oxford Brookes', 'Queen Mary', 'Roehampton', 'Robert Gordon', 'Greenwich', 'Kent', 'Delhi', 'Essex', 'London Metropolitan', 'Exeter', 'Dundee', 'Keele', 'Chichester', 'Southampton', 'Canterbury Christchurch', 'Edge Hill'.

TESTA Research Methods

(Drawing on Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet, 2008,2009)



TESTA project data

- * > 50 programme audits in 15 UK universities
- * > 2000 Assessment Experience Questionnaires (AEQs)
- * > 70 focus groups
- * Mainly UK data, but includes two Indian universities and one faculty in Australia

Four myths...

The header consists of a solid blue rectangular area at the top. Below this rectangle, there are several overlapping, wavy, light blue shapes that create a sense of depth and movement, resembling stylized waves or layers of paper.

Myth 1: Modules and semesters help students to learn better



The weak spot?

What students say...

- * It's difficult because your assignments are so detached from the next one you do for that subject. They don't relate to each other.*
- * Because it's at the end of the module, it doesn't feed into our future work.*
- * We don't get much time to think. We finish one assignment and the next one is knocking at the door.*
- * In the annual system the lecturers say that they had more time to explain in detail.*

... about shared practices

You'll get really detailed, really commenting feedback from one tutor and the next tutor will just say 'Well done'.

Some of the lecturers are really good at feedback and others don't write feedback, and they seem to mark differently. One person will tell you to reference one way and the other one tells you something completely different.

...about shared standards

Every lecturer is marking it differently, which confuses people.

We've got two tutors- one marks completely differently to the other and it's pot luck which one you get.

They have different criteria, they build up their own criteria.

Q: If you could change one thing to improve what would it be?

A: More consistent marking, more consistency across everything and that they would talk to each other.

How can assessment and feedback
help to join the dots?

The slide features a blue header with a wavy, layered design. The text is centered in white. Below the header, the background is white with faint, overlapping blue wavy lines that extend from the header's design.

Evidence to action: TESTA changes

- 1) More over-arching 'integrated' assessments across related modules
- 2) Fewer small summative assessments 'miniaturising' learning
- 3) More linked assessments (with feedback feeding forward)
- 4) Strengthening team approaches to marking through cover sheets and mentoring
- 5) Team calibration workshops

Myth 2: Assessment is mainly about grading

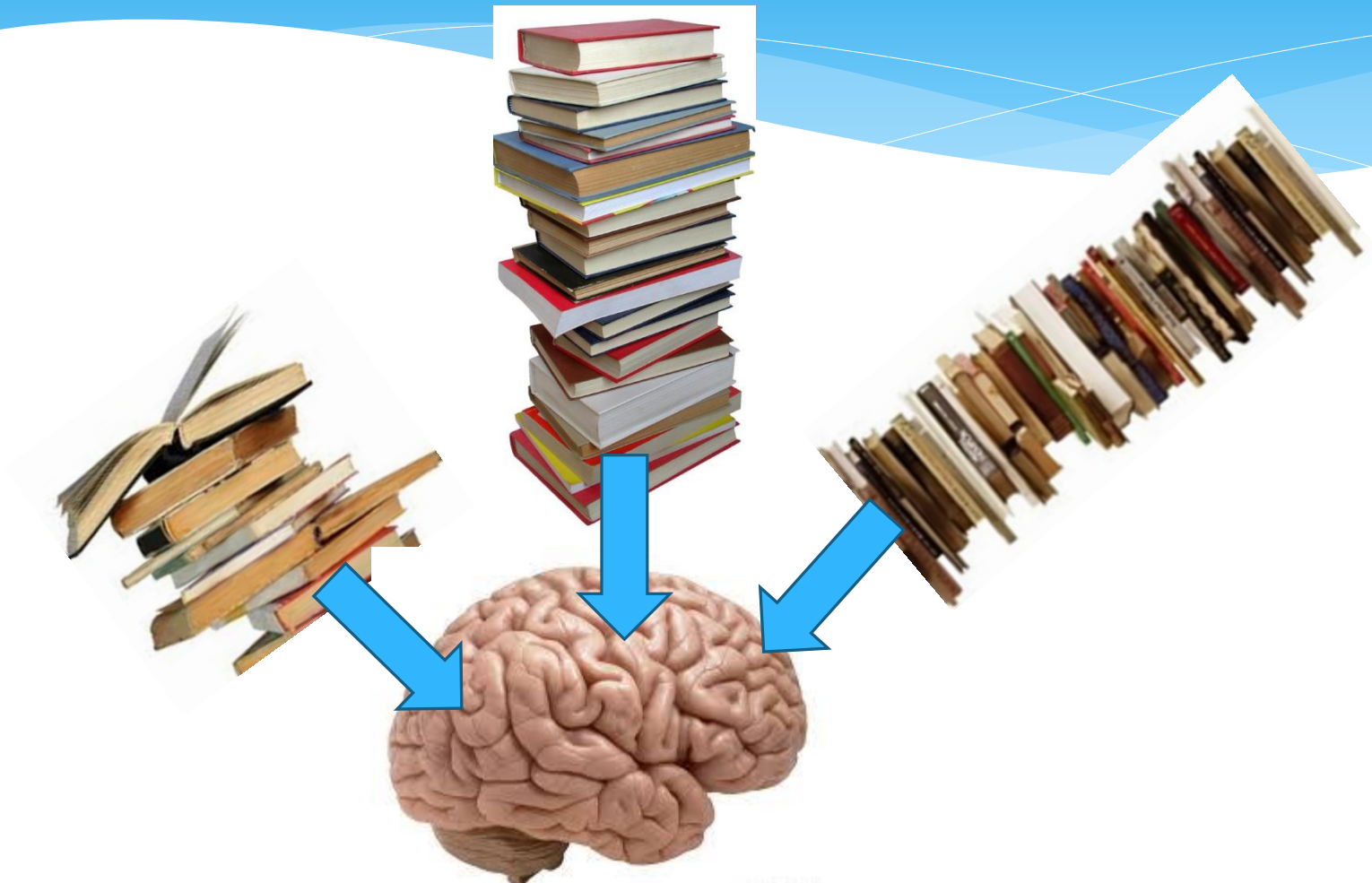


Hercules attacked the many heads of the hydra, but as soon as he smashed one head, two more would burst forth in its place!
Peisander 600BC

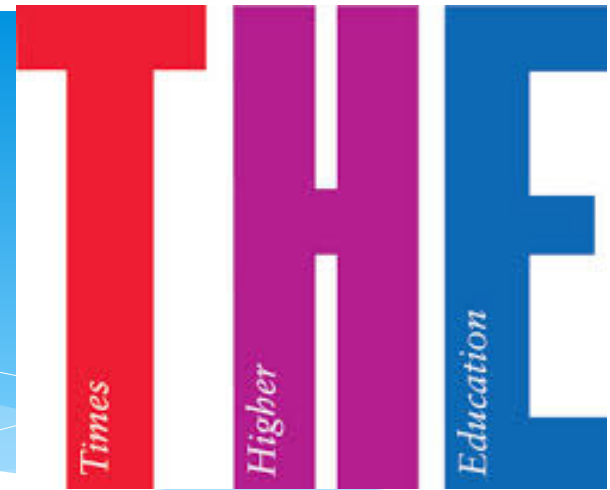
Audit data

- * Range of UK summative assessment 12-68 over three years
- * Indian and NZ universities – 100s of small assessments – busywork, grading as ‘pedagogies of control’
- * An ‘assessment arms race’ (Tony Harland)
- * Average in UK about two per module

More testing and grading = more learning?



A student's lecture to professors



The best approach from the student's perspective is to focus on concepts. I'm sorry to break it to you, but your students are not going to remember 90 per cent – possibly 99 per cent – of what you teach them unless it's conceptual.... when broad, overarching connections are made, education occurs. Most details are only a necessary means to that end.

http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/a-students-lecture-to-professors/2013238.fullarticle#.U3orx_f9xWc.twitter

What students say...

- * *A lot of people don't do wider reading. You just focus on your essay question.*
- * *I always find myself going to the library and going 'These are the books related to this essay' and that's it.*
- * *Although you learn a lot more than you would if you were revising for an exam, because you have to do wider research and stuff, you still don't do research really unless it's directly related to essays.*
- * *Unless I find it interesting I will rarely do anything else on it because I haven't got the time. Even though I haven't anything to do, I don't have the time, I have jobs to do and I have to go to work and stuff.*

Reading for a degree?

(Tony Harland, University of Otago)

How often students went beyond the syllabus for study and learning in relation to their academic goals

<i>Academic Goal</i>	<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>How often do you go 'beyond the syllabus'?</i>		
			<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Never</i>
Top Marks	Science	6	1	0	5
	Humanities	7	1	1	5
	Professional	8	0	0	8
Mid-range	Science	5	0	0	5
	Humanities	6	0	1	5
	Professional	7	0	0	7
Passing	Science	5	0	0	5
	Humanities	2	0	0	2
	Professional	0	0	0	0
Total		46	2	2	42

Evidence to Action: TESTA changes

- * Reducing summative assessments
- * Increasing the level of challenge of summative tasks
- * Increasing required and meaningful formative assessment
- * Encouraging students to produce writing more often in varied formats, and not for marks...

Myth 3: Formative assessment is too difficult to do, and not worth doing



Defining formative assessment

- * “Definitional fuzziness” Mantz Yorke (2003)
- * Basic idea is simple – to contribute to student learning through the provision of information about performance (Yorke, 2003).
- * A fine tuning mechanism for how and what we learn (Boud 2000)

TESTA's definition of formative

- * Ungraded, required and eliciting feedback

What students say about formative tasks...

- * It was really useful. We were assessed on it but we weren't officially given a grade, but they did give us feedback on how we did.*
- * It didn't actually count so that helped quite a lot because it was just a practice and didn't really matter what we did and we could learn from mistakes so that was quite useful.*
- * He's such a better essay writer because he's constantly writing. And we don't, especially in the first year when we really don't have anything to do. The amount of times formative assignments could have taken place...*

What prevents students from doing formative tasks...

- * If there weren't loads of other assessments, I'd do it.*
- * If there are no actual consequences of not doing it, most students are going to sit in the bar.*
- * It's good to know you're being graded because you take it more seriously.*
- * I would probably work for tasks, but for a lot of people, if it's not going to count towards your degree, why bother?*

Research to Action: TESTA changes

- * Increase formative assessment
- * Require formative tasks, using QA processes
- * Use public domain to motivate students to undertake formative tasks (presentations, posters, blogs)
- * Use authentic and challenging tasks linked to research, case studies and large projects
- * Multi-stage tasks – formative to summative
- * Set expectations about formative in first year
- * Send consistent messages as a programme team

Myth 4: Students are passive 'victims' of a (written) feedback monologue



Students say...

- * I read it and think “Well, that’s fine but I’ve already handed it in now and got the mark. It’s too late”.*
- * I read through it when I get it and that’s about it really. They all go in a little folder and I don’t look at them again most of the time. It’s mostly the mark really that you look for.*
- * I’m personally really bad at reading feedback. I’m the kind of person, and I hate to admit it, but I’ll look at the mark and then be like ‘well stuff it, I can’t do anything about it’.*

Which educational paradigm is
feedback in?



Transmission Model



Social Constructivist model

TESTA changes based on evidence

- * Feedback first, marks later
- * Developing dialogue through cover sheets
- * Students initiating feedback through questions
- * Technology to personalise feedback
- * Braving more peer and self-assessment

Impacts at Winchester

- * Improvements in NSS scores on A&F – from bottom quartile in 2009 to top quartile in 2013
- * Programme teams are talking about A&F and pedagogy
- * Course design processes are changing
- * Periodic review includes using the TESTA process (cf. Coventry, Keele, York, Dundee etc)

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Welcome to TESTA

Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) is a £200,000 National Teaching Fellowship project on programme assessment, funded by the Higher Education Academy, led by the University of Winchester (2009-2012).

TESTA originally conducted research on eight programmes in four partner universities to map assessment environments, develop interventions and evaluate them. The TESTA approach has been used with more than 100 programmes in over 30 UK universities, and in Australia, India and the USA. TESTA works with academics, students and managers - and for students, academics and managers - to identify study behaviour, generate assessment patterns to foster deeper learning across whole programmes, and debunk regulatory myths which prevent assessment for learning.



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