

To grade or not to grade: Student perceptions of the effects of grading a course in work-integrated learning

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Assessment is an integral component of a student's education and is recognised as an important factor in student learning (Irons, 2008). Assessment involves making judgements about the extent to which the performance of students meets particular standards. It also plays a significant role in fostering learning and the accreditation of students (Boud & Associates, 2010). As universities struggle to keep pace with a rapidly changing global context, assessment practices need to be reviewed and re-evaluated, particularly in relation to work integrated learning.

If we establish appropriate assessment processes, effective teaching and learning will follow (Curtis, 2010). 'The act of assessment signals the importance of what is being assessed, so assessment is a driver for learning' (Eisner, 1993). Pellegrino, Chudowsky and Glaser (2001) summarised the purposes of assessment as:

- Promoting learning;
- Measuring individual achievement; and
- Evaluating programs

Curtis (2010) considers that the answer to the first purpose may lie in formative assessment. He considers several aspects of assessment contribute to its formative effects. Firstly, assessment needs to be embedded into learning routines e.g. prompting learners with questions on aspects of a problem or task. Secondly, such assessment needs to occur frequently, thus the need for embedding in routine learning and teaching practices. Thirdly, it must be accompanied by informative feedback to learners about their learning progress. Good teachers are able to identify the gap between what students know and can do now and the goals for what students should 'know and be able to do' (Curtis, 2010, p.10). A fourth element of formative assessment is that learners must engage in the learning process. One of the most effective ways to encourage students to engage in assessment is through self-assessment, although peer-assessment is also used (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Boud & Hawke, 2003; Sadler, 1989; Wiggins, 1998). Curtis (2010) quoted Boud (2002, p.43), who argued:

By deliberately keeping assessment out of the hands of the hands of learners,
we are denying them one of the essential tools – perhaps the essential tool –
which enables them to become lifelong learners.

Assessment of work integrated learning produces different challenges for students who are accustomed to assignments and examinations. The strategies that students have used in these types of assessment may not necessarily be successful in the workplace setting. Stagnitti et al. (2010) indicate several differences of assessment conducted during fieldwork placement when compared to assessment in formal academic settings:

- Continuous assessment where aspects of performance are regularly assessed;
- Developmental process, providing opportunities for feedback;
- Ongoing learning occurring during assessment;
- Multiple assessors may be involved;
- Limited time for preparation and revision;
- Multiple sources of data can be utilized;
- Assessment is contextual and less controllable;
- Multiple criteria are involved;
- More abstract complex concepts are assessed; and
- Assessment is based on practice and performance rather than theory.

Assessing student performance in work integrated learning is a difficult task involving many decisions by a number of stakeholders (Billett, 2008). Validity and reliability are particular concerns due to the "multiple variables that affect both the design and subsequent implementation of assessment practices" (Hodges, Smith & Jones, 2005). Criterion-referenced assessment, which compares an individual's score with a specific criterion, is the form of assessment most commonly used in work integrated learning (Brown & Knight, 1994) and considers the competency of a student along a continuum of achievement. The purpose of this process is to determine the extent to which the standards have been achieved (Abeysekera, 2006; Bates, 2003) to allow more consistent and objective judgment (Biggs, 2003).

In the context of higher education, Laska & Juarez (1992) suggested that the use of grades for learning has been the subject of a long, ongoing debate. Original research by Colvin (1912) associated students' pursuit of good grades with workers' performance for pay and concluded that grades reward students for high academic standards. Laska & Juarez (1992) examined the semester grade point averages (GPA) outcomes between students whose grades are averaged into their cumulative GPA with those who take courses that use a pass/fail basis. They found that students in the former category had an increase of 11.4% above the average in the mean semester GPA and that for study-abroad students who took courses on a pass/fail basis, the results suggested that academic incentives were adversely affected by this grade transfer policy.

Thompson et al. (1996) noted that there was no universal agreement on the meaning of the term 'grading' and defined it as 'the practice of assessing and reporting levels of performance in ... competency-based vocational education and training, which is generally used to recognise merit and excellence' (p.3). Rumsey (1997, p.62) defined graded assessment as an approach that 'provides grades for combinations of demonstrated knowledge and performance'. Other terms that have been utilised to describe grading include 'performance levels' (Smith, 2000), 'levels of performance' (Thompson et al. 1996), 'levels of competency' (Dickson & Bloch, 1999) and 'levels of achievement' (Strong, 1995).

Thompson et al. (1996) conducted a comprehensive investigation into graded competency-based assessment in Australia. They considered the practices and policies of 'grading' levels of performance in vocational education and training programs provided by technical and further education (TAFE) institutions. Many of the results of their study are relevant to courses taught within Australian universities. The major proponents for the use of graded assessment were private educational providers, particularly with fee-paying students enrolled in tourism and hospitality courses. Thompson et al. (1996) provided an analysis of the particular stakeholder groups which advocate specific purposes for the use of grades. They indicated that teachers or trainers supported graded assessment for motivational purposes and also as a reward for excellence. This group also emphasised the role of graded assessment in improving the level of confidence in the assessment process, as well as providing information about the amount and quality of learning achieved. Similarly, the employer group supported the use of graded assessment for its capacity to motivate and reward, for the provision of feedback on learning outcomes and for the purposes of promotion and recognition for entry into other educational programs.

Tertiary institutions also supported its use for assisting in decisions about selection, whilst community groups supported the use of grading for providing feedback about learning achieved. However, the authors stressed that other members of these same stakeholder groups did not support grading. Opponents to the use of graded assessment indicated that the practice was inconsistent with the principles of competency-based assessment (Thompson et al. 1996). Some respondents suggested that grading created a competitive environment between students, where greater emphasis was placed on comparing individual students, rather than meeting an identified standard. Thompson et al. (1996) recommended further research be conducted to develop quality instruments and investigate the influence of graded assessment of student learning.

Williams & Bateman (2003) reviewed further research conducted on the grade debate and concluded that grading added to the complexity of assessment. They reported that the main drivers for graded assessment came from industry and students, who demonstrated dissatisfaction with the competent/not-yet competent reporting. Rumsey (1997) and Smith (2000) identified that some training providers used graded assessment as a marketing tool in the belief that dispensing a significant number of high grades makes the provider 'look good'. Strong (1995) suggests that grades in TAFE courses are relied upon to predict success in further study. Dickson & Bloch (1999) suggested graded assessment 'added value' to competency standards, where these standards provided a starting point for improvement, whilst Griffin et al. (2001) indicated that the selection paradigm, drives the need for graded assessment.

Rumsey & Associates (2002) developed the 'West Australian Model', which has been a significant contributor to the Australian debate on graded assessment in competency-based programs. The main principle underpinning this model is that:

- Competency must be assessed first, and grading is applied to the achievement of additional standards based on the Mayer key competencies (Maxwell, 2008).
- Rumsey & Associates (2002, p.46) describe those Mayer key competencies as:
- Demonstrated breadth of underpinning knowledge applied to the assessment task;
- Communication, people networking, language and interpersonal skills;
- Techniques and processes;
- Autonomy and performance in work tasks; and
- Work organisation

As feedback on performance can have significant influence, it is important that it should be as close as possible to true achievements. Johnson (2008) asserts that graded reporting affords such an outcome as it potentially provides more information than binary reporting techniques. Smith (2000) reported a majority of respondents interviewed for his research suggested that (ungraded) competency-based training and assessment were promoting mediocrity in the learning process. He considered the merits of grading from the viewpoint of an assessor and reported that grading can improve the validity and consistency of assessments because it forces assessors to analyse students' performances with greater care than in non-graded reporting systems, particularly as they have to consider the evidence of a performance in more specific detail in relation to set criteria. On the other hand, Williams and Bateman (2003) reported that lower ability students might be adversely affected by grading. Thus, the effects of grading may not be consistent for all learners and that the characteristics of specific learner groups need to be considered.

Andre (2000) indicated that the use of graded competency-based performance measures in assessing workplace performance needs consideration. With the current international trend for nurse education and other clinical sciences to be situated within the university sector, clinical assessment based on merit rather than pass/fail or non-graded pass is becoming more relevant. Benner (1984) suggested that varied levels of performance occur in clinical practice beyond what is regarded as an 'acceptable' standard. Thus, the use of pass-fail grades limits the reporting of performance standards to acceptable and non-acceptable practice. A meritorious grading system denotes standards beyond a mere pass, including the communication of exemplary levels of performance. High achieving students are disadvantaged by non-graded or pass/fail grading systems, as their achievements are not reported to employing bodies, selection committees for postgraduate programs and scholarships (Biggs, 1992). Andre (2000) suggested that grading categories should be consistent with standard university graded assessment policy e.g. 85-100% would be classified as a high distinction, 75-84% as a distinction.

In relation to medical education, Miller (2009) suggested that the primary purpose of any grading system is to measure the achievement of specific learning objectives. The information collected allows individual students to know where they stand in relation to the development of needed competencies, as well as supplying faculty and medical administration with information about the effectiveness of teaching strategies. Miller (2009) indicated that a traditional grade stratifies students according to their levels of achievement, can motivate students, rewards effort and may demonstrate suitability for a potential area of study, whereas a pass/fail grade indicates simply that a student has achieved an expected level of competence. She noted that if students are hypercompetitive, it is unlikely that the grading system alone is responsible for creating that behaviour. Similarly, if students consistently aim at minimal standards, the teaching-learning environment might lack the ingredients to inspire excellence.

Competency-based assessment may differ from other forms of assessment because its outcomes may be based on observed performances carried out in a variety of contexts, such as workplaces or university-based simulations. Measures need to be taken to ensure that assessment decisions are consistent across these contexts (Johnson, 2008). Another problem is that competency-based qualification stakeholders can perceive graded assessments to be the same as norm-referenced assessments (Peddie, 1997; Williams and Bateman, 2003). This situation may lead to 'competent' being equated with 'average' or 'pass'. Schofield and McDonald (2004) suggest that the status of a competent result might be devalued by graded assessments. They highlight the potential risk of 'competent' judgments might equate with a 'bare minimum', rather than acknowledgement that the learner has reach a pre-determined standard.

Hager, Athanassou and Gonczi (1994) suggest that it is possible to both support and oppose graded assessment, depending on the circumstances. They infer that the decision to grade or not to grade is ultimately a policy decision, which should be based on the benefits to be gained and whether grading is the most appropriate strategy to achieve the desired benefits. Quirk (1995) adopted a similar approach, noting that the benefits and purposes must be clearly identified when making a decision to grade or not to grade.

Case Study

Griffith University has several campuses located in Brisbane and the Gold Coast, Queensland. Griffith University's teaching and learning programs aim to provide opportunities for students to acquire knowledge and skills that can be applied in the community. Griffith aims to include work-integrated learning in at least 70% of all degree programs by 2010 (Griffith University, 2006). Field Project B is an optional third year course in the Bachelor of Exercise Science program conducted at the Gold Coast campus. Normal enrolments in the course range from 20-50 students out of a cohort of approximately 120. The rationale for including this course is to make students aware of the requirements of the industry they wish to enter and the working environment of various organizations in which they may wish to seek employment. The course is designed to link and complement the student's program of study by introducing them to the work environment. The main purposes of this course are: (a) to provide students with work experience within the

industry they may seek employment; (b) to introduce students to various topics concerning the work environment; and (c) to provide career planning procedures and job search skills training. Students are required to complete a minimum of 80 hours work experience in an industry of choice (approximately one day per week) throughout the semester.

The course includes both career development learning and work integrated learning. 13 two-hour lecture/workshops in which students are introduced to professional and personal techniques to assist them to gain entry into the workplace and to function successfully once they are in the workplace. The course is staff-intensive with input from lecturers from the School of Physiotherapy and Exercise Science, Careers and Employment Services and relevant employer groups. The lecture/workshops include:

- Introduction to the world of work (1 week)
- Career education lectures (7 weeks)
 - Career planning, job search, resume, applications, selection criteria, interviews, mock interview, cultural inclusiveness
- Presentations by industry representatives (5 weeks)
 - Fitness, cardiac services, sleep disorders, sport & recreation, sports coaching & administration, event management, pharmaceutical sales, rehabilitation, physiotherapy

The course had been non-graded until 2010 with students receiving either a non-graded pass or fail grade. Students in the previous year's cohort suggested that the course should be graded to increase their motivation and performance in the various assessment items. Discussion took place between the lecturer and the students concerning the items that should be included as assessment tasks. Students individually recorded the various percentages that they considered should be allocated to each item respectively. A median score for each assessment item was calculated with the results as follows:

Attendance and participation	5%
Resume and job application	15%
Interview performance & reflection	20%
ePortfolio	15%
Performance in field work placement	20%
Placement handbook completion	5%
Critical reflection report	20%

This structure was adopted in the course assessment design in 2010. This particular research focused on an evaluation of the perceived effectiveness of the assessment procedures following the completion of the course in 2010.

Research Methodology

Research Purpose

This research examined the effectiveness of the assessment procedures in Field Project, a work-integrated learning course focused on preparing students for real-world positions in industries relevant to their undergraduate studies in Exercise Science. The results will be used to improve outcomes for future students. The study included the following research questions:

What were the perceived advantages and disadvantages of a graded, rather than a non-graded, status for Field Project?

How valid did students consider the individual assessment items?

How fairly did students perceive the individual assessment items had been marked?

How has grading of the course affected:

Student motivation and effort in the course?

The level of student reflection and critical thinking?

Student interaction within the course?

Group cohesion and competition?

Students' sense of achievement at the completion of the course?

The attitudes of students towards lifelong learning?

Student overall enjoyment of the course?

Other relevant learning outcomes?

Data Collection

The research was conducted using 29 third year Exercise Science students who made up the entire cohort in Field Project at Griffith University. Students responded to a self-completion questionnaire specifically designed for this study

(appendix A). The two-page questionnaire allowed students to provide specific information on aspects of assessment and grading (questions 1-3). In addition, seven (7) students volunteered for a 10-15 minute interview to seek more in-depth responses on the effects of grading (question 4).

Research Findings

The research findings are reported here using the four research questions as headings:

What were the perceived advantages and disadvantages of a graded, rather than a non-graded, status for Field Project?

The students indicated a number of advantages of grading the course. The most common benefits suggested (number of students shown in brackets):

Improved Grade Point Average to assist entry into postgraduate programs (16);

Increased motivation and effort (13);

Take the course more seriously/ get value from the course (8); and

Recognition, reward and satisfaction (5).

In response to their perceptions of the disadvantages of grading the course, 13 students (45%) suggested there were no disadvantages. Other responses included:

Takes up extra time and reduces time to spend on other courses (2);

No reward for effort (2); and

Focus on marks rather than performance on placement (2).

How valid did students consider the individual assessment items?

Students were asked which individual items they considered to be valid for assessment purposes. Overall, their responses indicated highly positive perceptions in relation to the validity of the assessment items. All students suggested that the cover letter and resume, interview performance and fieldwork placement were valid items. 25 (86%) students agreed that the interview reflection provided appropriate validity, whilst 24 (83%) indicated that the poster presentation was a suitable item of assessment. Several students had minimal prior experience and feedback in writing concise accurate statements, which would account for only 21 (72%) suggesting that the writing of weekly postings was a valid assessment item.

How fairly did students perceive the individual assessment items had been marked?

Criteria sheets were provided to students in relation to each assessment item. The majority of students considered that the assessment items were marked fairly with a mean score of 95% of positive responses. All students indicated that the cover letter and resume, fieldwork placement and poster presentation had been marked fairly, whilst 97% agreed with the fairness of the marking of the interview performance and reflection. The lowest score (75%) was recorded in relation to the marking of the weekly postings, indicating that students require more feedback and perhaps the opportunity to resubmit a posting if they are dissatisfied with the mark awarded.

How has grading of the course affected:

Student motivation and effort in the course?

The general consensus of responses suggested that grading had significant positive effects on student motivation and effort in the course. Student 1 indicated that, if the course had been non-graded, she would have aimed only for a pass standard. Student 6 expressed a similar opinion: "I aimed for a HD. If it was pass-fail, I would have only made a pass effort. I think that definitely affected the effort I put in. I was motivated to get a better mark". Student 2 noted: "I wouldn't be paying as much attention if I knew I wouldn't be graded". Student 3 was more forthcoming and commented that she would not have enrolled in the course if it was not graded. She indicated that the grading provided recognition for work completed and that feedback throughout the semester motivated her to work harder to ensure her marks were of the highest standard. Student 4 also considered that there was no motivation for any extra effort if the course had been non-graded. "I wouldn't have prioritized the assessment so highly. I would have done what was necessary to get through and put more effort into other projects or subjects that are marked and graded, so I guess grading facilitates you taking the course more seriously". Several students mentioned the effects of grading on their GPA (Grade Point Average). Student 5 indicated that "if you didn't have the grading going towards your GPA, you would have a lot of people who would not do their best work and would rush it to get just a pass. It's made me realise that it's very important to be prepared for going into the workforce". Student 7 emphasized the importance of receiving regular feedback and marks as an indicator of the direction in which she was heading. "Getting a good mark keeps you motivated, whereas getting no mark you might slack off a bit".

Students were required to make 100 word postings related to the weekly lecture/ workshop. Student 1 suggested that the grading motivated her to strive to get full marks for each posting, even though each was only worth 2% of the total assessment. Student 2 indicated that the regular grading and feedback related to weekly postings made a significant difference to his motivation. "If you saw you were doing something wrong, you could fix it for next time. The feedback made a difference". Student 6 noted that grading motivated her to make more effort in the standard of writing in each posting. "I thought about what I was writing. I tried to put it in a professional manner. If it wasn't graded, I would probably have only put in a pass effort. This will do – I hope it gets by. Each week I was aiming for a HD. I was aiming for that little bit extra, rather than a pass. Student 7 emphasized the value of a weekly assessment item in reducing the pressure related to major assessment items. "It kind of kept your mind active in the subject. The grading was good because it was still worth something, but it wasn't a massive percentage towards the final grade, so you could build up marks as you go, which means that the bigger assessment items weren't worth as much. There's not as much pressure in the end".

In relation to their performance at the interview, students generally considered that grading had positive effects. Student 3 indicated that grading ensured the interview was at a professional standard, whilst student 4 suggested that grading "stands me in good stead for future interviews". Furthermore, student 6 perceived that grading ensured the interview became more like a real-life scenario. "If it was ungraded, I wouldn't have been as nervous or taken it as seriously". Similarly, student 7 noted that a grade demonstrates "how well or poorly you have done", which is important feedback for future interviews. Student comments on the grading of the interview reflection were rather mixed – some students perceived there were minimal effects, whilst others suggested that grading forced them to take a more serious look at their reflection and focus on specific aspects of the interview.

The majority of students indicated that the grading of the resume and cover letter had beneficial effects. Student 4 suggested: "I needed that experience as people will be critical when they read my application. The critical judgment was more friendly than it would be in an employment situation. It showed me the weaknesses in my resume when applying for jobs in the future". Student 6 stated: "If it was non-graded and I only received feedback that it was a pass, I wouldn't feel very confident giving it to an employer". Similar statements were provided as to the effects of grading on student efforts in the development of the posters. Student 6 represented group opinion and emphasized the amount of time spent on the poster. "If it was pass-fail, I would probably not have even done a draft. I think the quality of the poster was very good at the end. If it was non-graded, I would not have produced as good a quality poster".

Students expressed varying thoughts on the effects of grading on their motivation and effort during their 80 hour placements. Student 2 noted: "A mark is not appropriate because of the different assessors – would have been better to have had a pass-fail competency test", whilst student 6 indicated that grading made no difference as he was in a professional environment "and would have performed the same regardless". On the other hand, student 3 suggested that the grading helped him to strive to work harder and provided recognition for work completed. "You need to make a difference to get a good report from your supervisor". Student 7 reiterated these comments: "You had to try really hard to make the supervisor believe that you deserved the mark you got. Being graded gives you the motivation to do your best in the placement".

The level of student reflection and critical thinking?

Six out of the seven students interviewed suggested that grading the course increased their level of reflection and critical thinking, with student 4 indicating that he "already did a fair bit of that kind of thinking". Student 1 noted that there were more reflective activities in this course than any other course in the program. This was particularly evident in the required weekly reflections as students needed to personally reflect on the content of the lecture/ workshops and write a 100 word statement, which was graded against set criteria on a weekly basis. Student 7 noted that the "weekly reflections were good for that. Being graded you really had to think about what you had done that week and what you had taken out of it".

Students were also required to write a 250-300 word reflection on their performance in a mock interview. Student 3 perceived:

I didn't realise how much I could understand myself and I wouldn't have done it if it wasn't for marks. It's not something that's easy to do – to criticize yourself – if you're not going to get any benefit out of it. In fact, the long-term gains we got out of all the exercises that we have done are all so beneficial.

Student 5 suggested that grading the course definitely improved the way he approached writing and reflecting on tasks. "The grading made me more aware of my grammar and sentence structure. It made me check over my work, which is important in a work placement. Simply sending an email can be a reflection on you". Student 6 indicated that grading

particularly affected the development of his resume, taking on the feedback received and applying more effort “because my resume is going out into the real world”.

Student interaction within the course?

Opinions were mixed as to the effects of grading the course on student’s interaction with their peers. Three students indicated that grading created more interaction, whilst four suggested that it had little effect. Student 1 perceived that there was more interaction due to the small class size. “We were all interested to know what marks we got and to try to give feedback to each other”. Student 3 enjoyed the competition that grading created on a week-to-week basis. He noted:

I was disappointed when my mark was not as good as some of my friends.
It actually made me look at other students’ work (which was freely available)
to try to match their grades because I wanted to excel in the subject”.

Student 7 reiterated these comments and also indicated that students sought to help each other improve their work. “I noticed my mate was struggling at the start of the semester so I proofread his work a couple of times....The grading gives you the feedback you need. It really puts gauge on how you’re going”.

On the other hand, student 2 indicated that grading made no difference as she was friendly with quite a few students beforehand. Student 4 provided similar comments but noted that students reviewed other students’ work for comparative purposes. “I knew who were the high performers in the group, but not a personal level”. Student 5 indicated that she sat with the same person in the same place each week and suggested that greater interaction could be developed through more group activity. Student 6 believed that the interaction was no greater, but students probably spoke to each other on a more professional level. “If the course was non-graded, I probably would have been more casual and that would have been reflected in the assessment items as well. Our discussion in the course was mainly about what we were doing in our work placements, how we were going in our assessments and that sort of thing”.

Group cohesion and competition

In general, students perceived that the grading of the course produced healthy competition, which assisted the development of group cohesion. Student 3 represented student opinions when he asserted:

There was a level of healthy competition. I think it pulled us together. It really built my
Self-confidence because you are learning about yourself and everyone else is doing the same thing. We’re all
growing together in the same aspects. It was a really healthy
environment, really supportive and we were getting good feedback, nothing negative.
It was all about everyone progressing. It was good to progress together. That definitely happened.

Student 4 emphasised that self-competition was intrinsically related. “It was all about advancing my own mark about myself. I would very competitive with my own mark but not so much with others. Grading increased my motivation not to let anything slide”. She would read through her drafts, make changes and became more critical of her own work. Student 5 noted that weaker students asked those who gained good marks to proofread their work and suggested that “it was a good idea to have the individual marks visible”, as it made those who scored low marks realise that they needed to put in greater efforts to improve their results. Student 6 similarly commented that students made a conscious effort to assist each other to achieve their goals.

Students’ sense of achievement at the completion of the course?

All students commented that the grading of the course had a positive effect on their sense of achievement. Student 1 indicated she gained more in the classroom activities than in the workplace. “The workplace was great – it provided a different experience which I really appreciated”. Conversely, students 2 and 4 suggested that their greatest sense of achievement came from their workplace assessments. Student 3 noted that grading had made the course more worthwhile. “I loved the course but I loved it more because I have recognition of how much effort I put in. I’m sitting on a HD and I’ve really put my all into this course because I’ve got so much out of it. I can’t stress that enough”. She considered that the course not have had such outcomes if she couldn’t compare her marks with other students. She indicated that:

I would not have that self-satisfaction without the marks. It’s me progressing –
the combination of the two – that provides the evidence. I wouldn’t have gained
that confidence, the proof that you’re growing so I think grading is vital. You’re at
uni to do your best.

Student 5 provided a similar viewpoint and inferred that a non-graded pass does not produce the feeling that the student has achieved a good result. "I don't think anyone would try as much in the subject". Student 6 reinforced this notion and considered that "if I put in this much effort and only received a Non-Graded Pass, I would have looked towards the course a little negatively. I've put in the hard yards and got a good mark". She suggested that there was a strong relationship between a student's effort and grade, which would not have been evident if the course had been non-graded. Student 7 described a good mark in a course as "a real accomplishment, which reflects on your efforts in the course. Without that grading you are left with a pass and it's all over. Getting a good grade makes you really proud of what you have achieved –it's all worth it". There was a significant number of high grades in the course, but student 7 considered:

The high grades might not suit the Bell curve, but that just shows what a great course it was and how motivated students were towards achieving. Field Project provides stuff you really want to do, which may be different to other courses, as it's real life stuff and you try as hard as you can. It's not just a textbook.

The attitudes of students towards lifelong learning?

Five students commented that the grading of the course had changed their attitude towards lifelong learning. Student 1 suggested that she was learning every single day on the work placement. "if you are interested in something, you'll go and do more research – trying to get patients to exercise, check files, speak to physios. I apply this attitude to all aspects of my life". Student 3 inferred that grading provided the motivating factor for the increased interest in exploring career opportunities. "This is how you want to set up your life up every day so you are become professional in your attitude". Student 5 indicated that grading the course had helped him realise that minor details are important as they highlight the areas on which to focus. Student 6 commented that he probably took the lectures from different employer groups more seriously knowing that he had to complete a graded weekly reflection." I really listened and paid attention to each lecturer and what they had to say". Student 7 stated that the grading of the course and within her university degree in general have affected her attitude towards lifelong learning. "When you out in the real world, you are going to be judged on what you are doing. If you don't keep up with the latest readings and technology, then you're going to be left behind".

Student 2 indicated that the grading of the course had no effect on her attitude to lifelong learning. However, she noted that she had no interest in research before the course, but after her work placement, in which she observed her supervisors reading journal articles and researching best treatments, she now considered that research was not as much as a chore as when she was in the role of a student at university. Student 4 suggested that the grading of Field Project had similar effects on his attitude towards lifelong long as other courses as all courses at university are graded. "I think your learning doesn't stop, it just changes. Grading adds to the motivation to continue learning, but is not essential".

Student overall enjoyment of the course?

Six of the seven students interviewed considered that grading had increased their enjoyment of the course. One student indicated that grading probably made little difference to his enjoyment, but he stated that he would not have taken the assessment items as seriously if they had been non-graded. Student 1 mentioned that the grading of the course had introduced an element of competitiveness into the course. The positive effects were obvious as she suggested that "she liked to push myself a little harder to do as well as I can. I scored almost 98% overall –I was really impressed with it". Student 3 perceived that she would not have had the level of enjoyment she had experienced if she had not received a grade. "If I didn't get the recognition of how hard I worked, I would just be so disappointed. The grading makes it worthwhile – it's vital. I would not have picked the opportunity to self-propel myself forward like this course has provided if it wasn't graded".

Student 4 noted differences in her attitude to the effects of grading at different stages of the course. "If you asked me at the start of the semester if I wanted to be graded or not, I probably would have said no because this would have been one less stress to worry about. I could go through the course and enjoy it being relaxed". However, at the end of the semester, she noted:

Now I would say yes, because I have had a good experience with it. My enjoyment of the grading of the course would depend on my final mark. There is a direct link between enjoyment and your result. I think it would be sense of wasted effort, a sense of purposelessness if the course was not graded.

Student 5 perceived that she gained more enjoyment as she would not have applied herself as much if it was non-graded. She indicated that students demonstrate greater application and gain most benefit from the learning experiences when courses are graded. The effects of grading on student enjoyment are clearly evident in the response from student

6. “As the course is graded, I probably enjoyed it more because there was a greater sense of satisfaction from the results I was getting. I was putting in more effort and getting good results, so I was enjoying it”. Student 7 expressed similar sentiments, suggesting that grading provides a direction for the course. “Getting a good mark puts you in a positive mindset – it makes you want to keep achieving that same mark. I think that maintaining good grades, which I managed to do throughout the course, really helped me”.

The breakdown of marking and the spread of workload within the course played important roles in the students’ enjoyment of the course. Student 7 reported:

Having something to do each week assessment-wise was great. Some other courses have end-of-semester exams worth 50%, which is a lot to do in one slice. Breaking the assessment down makes it more achievable, whereas doing assessment in a big lump puts a lot of pressure on people and they suffer. When you have so much to learn at one time, it becomes more like rote learning than actually maintaining the information you have stored in your head. Step-by-step learning really reinforces what you are learning as you go is a lot better way to do it.

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