

Loughborough University Teaching Innovation Awards

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Project title

The Critical Reading and Writing (CReW) Project

N.B. Expand the text boxes as necessary. It is perfectly acceptable to use bullet pointed lists of outcomes, issues, activities, etc. if preferred

Abstract (200-250 words)

The CReW project focused on supporting the development of critical reading/writing skills and enhancing academic practice around critical thinking for first year UG students undertaking a core module in SSEHS. The project derived from staff reflections on practice and evident resonance between their concerns and wider academic debates. They identified that many students had limited understandings of criticality and often executed these skills poorly within coursework. A review of feedback provided to students indicated that it consistently highlighted the need for students to go beyond description and look more critically at alternative perspectives. Discussions with students also revealed a lack of confidence around critical reading/writing/thinking, with confusion around requirements/expectations across disciplines in this respect. The CReW project was developed to help address these issues and was embedded within a first year module on the SES degree programme (student n = 218) that already had a focus on critical inquiry. Through the development of an interactive workbook, tailored activities and coordinated delivery (across lectures, seminars and tutorials) the project sought to: foster enhanced understanding of critical thinking; increase students' capacity/confidence to engage in critical debate; and facilitate the development of key criticality skills that would aid their capacity to meet the needs of assessment practices. Research activities (survey/focus groups) were designed to run alongside the project activities, to ascertain the perspectives of students/staff and consider areas for development. The findings indicate that students recognised the need for the CReW project and, for those who 'bought in', provided evident benefits.

Issue(s) addressed by project

The core issue addressed by the project is students' limited clarity around and understanding of criticality skills (critical reading, writing and thinking) as well as their perceived lack of confidence to be able to apply these appropriately in relation to assessment practices.

Aims

The broad aim of the CReW project was to develop a structure that can better support UG students to build critical reading, writing and thinking skills for their studies and beyond. More specifically, it seeks to:

- Develop and deliver teaching activities/resources aimed at enhancing criticality in UG students;
- Undertake student-centred research to evaluate project impact and lead to subsequent developments;
- Develop and share 'best practice' guidelines in relation to supporting students with critical reading/writing.

Specific objectives

Specific objectives of the **CReW** project were to: develop resources and activities to support critical skill development within an UG module in SSEHS (PSA011); develop a community of practice that fosters critical peer discussion; and facilitate students' meaningful engagement in assessment activities.

Activities/methodology

Activities

- (i) **Construction of the workbook:** This involved drawing together relevant information/supporting material on critical reading, writing and thinking and then developing/adapting tasks that could facilitate student learning in these areas. The workbook also included sections for each seminar and tutorial session, with tasks tailored to support learning and group discussion/debate. The workbook was printed and distributed in hard copy to all students registered on the Introduction to Sport Pedagogy (17PSA011) module (n=218). An electronic copy was also placed on LEARN.
- (ii) **Development/Revision of Teaching:** All teaching sessions were revisited and revised as necessary (to align with the CReW workbook) ahead of module delivery.
- (iii) **Staff Professional Development:** One of the project leads (Sandford) attended a HEA workshop on enhancing students' skills in critical writing. This was helpful in terms of considering future refinement/development of the workbook.

Methodology

The CReW project was delivered across Semester 1 of the 2017/18 academic year (Oct 2017- Feb 2018). The research activities comprised:

- (i) Semi-structured online surveys (pre- and post-delivery);
- (ii) Focus group discussions with students;
- (iii) Reflective conversations between academic staff.

The **pre-delivery** survey asked students to reflect on their current confidence/perceived competence with regard to the criticality-based requirements of academic study and to consider what support they felt they might need in this respect. From a cohort of 218, a total of 150 responses were received for the pre-delivery survey (representing a 69% response rate).

The **post-delivery** survey repeated this format, but also asked students to reflect on what they felt they had learnt and to identify aspects of the CReW project that they felt worked particularly well or that could be developed. A total of 49 responses were received (a 23% response rate).

Ten **focus group discussions** were conducted with a sample of students after the module had finished (participant n = 20). Within these semi-structured discussions, students were given the opportunity to expand on their survey answers and to consider key aspects of project delivery.

Data generated throughout the project (survey responses, focus group transcripts and reflective fieldnotes) have been collated and in the process of being analysed to identify key findings and points of interest relating to the aims of CReW and broader academic debates. Quantitative data will be used to generate descriptive statistics and qualitative data will be analysed thematically using a constructivist grounded theory approach. It is intended that the analysis will help to inform ongoing project design and development.

Project outcomes/findings

A preliminary analysis of the data indicates significant support for the CReW project amongst students. In particular, the pre-delivery survey highlighted that there was a perceived need by students for additional support with demonstrating criticality within coursework, with more than 80% of respondents indicating that they felt the project would be useful in this regard. Moreover, students suggested that the CReW project design seemed pertinent to their needs; with structuring essays, accessing relevant sources and accurate referencing frequently cited as areas where students lacked confidence. The focus group discussions also highlighted that the integrated nature of the project (linking CReW activities through lectures, seminars and tutorials) was particularly well received and that students valued enhanced support from academic staff.

Some areas for potential development have already been noted, including enhancing the 'usability' of the CReW workbook in teaching sessions – potentially through the digitisation of this resource and the provision of supporting materials in different formats. Moreover, it is felt that the co-teaching element of the project could be extended, as students found this particularly useful. On the whole, students' perspectives of the CReW project were positive. However, it is acknowledged that engagement was varied across the cohort and the level of 'buy-in' from students influenced the extent of the benefits accrued. Further analysis of the data is due to be undertaken and consideration will be given to the potential of the project to impact on students' learning.

Project outputs/deliverables

- * CReW workbook comprising: information on critical reading, writing & thinking; activities/tasks to help students build skills; information/activities relating to module seminars & tutorials; links to additional sources of support material; student/staff 'tips' on good critical writing.
- * Revised module content that is aligned with the workbook.
- * Research data relating to student/staff experiences of CReW and perspectives on further development of CReW resources.
- * Dissemination outputs (see below).

Impact on teaching and learning (for your students, your School and including links to University strategy) [*This will be the longest and most significant section*]

With regard to *enhancing student learning and assessment outcomes*, data indicate that the average grade for students taking PSA011 increased slightly between 2016/17 and 2017/18, from 58.7% to 59.5%. There were also more 70+ marks for students undertaking the module in this academic year – 27, compared with 20 for the previous year.

When considering *improving relationships and enhancing student satisfaction*, the module feedback data indicate an improvement from previous years with key statistics being: 92% felt the module helped to develop an understanding of the subject; 89% felt the module was well organised; 73% felt learning resources were useful; and 89% noting they had opportunities to participate in classes (e.g. through discussion, debate and problem-solving). Personal communication with students following the module also indicates a strong appreciation for the caring, helpful and engaged approach shown by staff.

The CReW project has also had an impact on broader teaching within SSEHS, with CReW activities and resources being used in additional modules in Part B (Teaching and Coaching 2) and Part C (Teaching and Coaching 3) to support students' critically reflective writing.

The CReW project has been nominated for an award in the Loughborough Academic Awards (Leaders in Collaboration category).

Dissemination plans including location of developed resources for Loughborough colleagues to access (resources can be attached to this document or linked to – in which case please provide an accessible location of resources)

- * Presentation of findings at the L&T conference (June 2018)
- * Paper to be presented (following peer review) to the HE network at the European Conference for Educational Research (Sept 2018).
- * Planned publication of the paper above in a HE-focussed journal.
- * A follow-up TIA submission has been submitted, with the aim of developing and digitising the CReW workbook (attached) to facilitate further dissemination.

Use of award money (outline breakdown)

Spent

Printing resources = £250

Attendance at HEA workshop = £300

Vouchers (incentive/prize draw reward to support research engagement) = £250

Transcription = £350

Planned Spending (before July 31st)

ECER conference support = £1100 (tbc)

Consultancy = 750 (tbc)

Please submit the completed documentation by **30 April 2018** to:
Deena Ingham, *Teaching Innovation Awards Panel*
Centre for Academic Practice

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