
CASE STUDY 9

Assessment as Learning – Measuring your own Success

Discipline: Anatomical studies/Advanced methods of sculpting
Student Numbers: 30



iadt
DUBLIN COLLEGE OF ARTS

Ger Clancy

Introduction and Context

The 3-Dimensional Design, Modelmaking and Digital Art course in IADT has been running for the past 25 years. Submission to gain entry on to the program is by a portfolio application and Leaving Certificate points. (The Leaving Certificate is the second level exit assessment in Ireland). There are approximately 30 students on the course each year.

As a discipline, (Art and Design) decisions measuring success can appear subjective. A key objective of this assessment method was to encourage students to develop a critical faculty and an ability to assess their own progress. This is achieved by including students in the assessment process and getting them to grade their own work. Effectively, they become a part of a panel assessment team that analyses their creative endeavours. Including the students in a carefully managed assessment process helps them distinguish the critical analysis processes required to develop an objective opinion.

The driving principle is that if students are to achieve consistently high levels of performance, they need to develop a conceptualisation of what constitutes 'quality' as a generalised attribute (Sadler, 1983). They also need to be inducted into evaluating quality, without necessarily being bound by tightly specified criteria. This approach mirrors the way multi-criterion judgments are typically made by experienced teachers. It is also an authentic representation of the ways many appraisals are made in a host of everyday contexts by experts and non-experts alike. Equipping students with evaluative insights and skills therefore contributes an important graduate skill. Sadler (2009)

Design and Implementation of the initiative

Within the BA, students conceive, design and create objects for the real and virtual world, oftentimes resulting in them designing characters, environments and props. They use a wide variety of materials during their studies. The course is delivered by a combination of one-to-one tutorials, demonstration and group discussions. A hands-on, practical experience is a core value of the programme.

Advanced Sculpting is a Year Two module, aimed primarily at furthering understanding of anatomy, scale, observation, sculpting methods, composition and weight. An Écorché approach to sculpting is used which involves sculpting the figure as a skeleton, gradually building up ligaments, musculature and finally skin. The module finesses sculpting prowess and anatomical understanding. The module takes place over 6 days, for 6 hours a day with regular breaks. There is a human model and scale Écorché model present in the room for students to observe and study.

There are 4 stages to the module as outlined below:

Stage 1 - Research

I ask students to research figurative art. Results range anywhere from Greek classical statues, to Soviet Era Russian figurative monuments to characters in modern Computer Game Art. This research forms the body of a general discussion around representation of the figure in Art and the techniques involved in creating a figurative sculpture.

Stage 2 - Application

Students begin by building an armature, composing it into the correct position and applying the clay. Tuition focusses on observing inaccuracies in the sculpture, discussing weight and composition, texturing and finish.

Stage 3 - Reflection

Students are regularly encouraged to move back from their piece, to observe their work and consider what is wrong with it. Photographing their sculpture and then analysing the printed picture can give them fresh perspective on their work, helping the student to detect imperfections themselves. This approach coincides with Sadler's Proposition 1 (2009), which refers to students developing an ability, during the process of creating their work, to critically self-assess.

At a certain point, I ask students to stop the work they are doing and turn to their peer's work. They offer each other some critique of the form/anatomy and advice on how to correct inaccuracies. Students report that they are surprised at how easily this comes to them and that they enjoy giving guidance. This helps to develop a sense of community and cooperation within the class group.

Stage 4 - Critique

When the sculpting days are complete, the students are invited to an assessment morning where they are active participants in the assessment process.

I begin by talking about the module progress - what has been achieved, how the work looks generally and I inform students that they are going to proceed with the assessment now. Typically, at this point students have a flurry of concerned questions. I tell the cohort they will be ordering the sculptures in order of excellent to 'less excellent'. Some believe this cannot be done, others furtively step forward excited to give it a go. I remind students of what their module guidelines were.



Figure 1: Image of Students at Stage 2 – Application. Nestor, S. (2019)



Figure 2: Image of Students at Stage 3 – Reflection. Nestor, S. (2019)

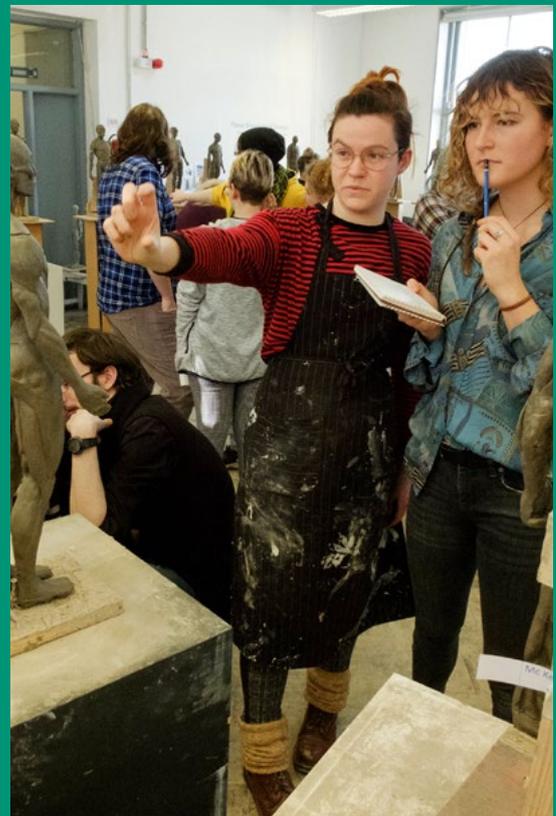


Figure 3: Image of Students at Stage 3 – Assessment. Nestor, S. (2019)

The students are given a choice of three roles in the assessment process:

- 1 Assistance** - Being part of the event by placing the sculptures in order but preferring to let others take responsibility for making decisions.
- 2 Audience** - Watching the assessment, talking amongst themselves but not directly becoming involved initially.
- 3 Assessors** - They engage with the task of assessment and decide the ranking order of the sculptures from excellent to less excellent.

It becomes apparent very quickly that being an assessor changes how the students view the process. The students may gravitate towards individuals they are comfortable to work with and form self-selected groups (panels). Some groups question how marks are assigned and for what while others begin to range the work in order of excellence without hesitation.

Once a hierarchy in the work is established, some of the audience will begin discussions amongst themselves, often disagreeing with decisions made. Emotions are often evident as all students, in their various roles as Assistant, Audience or Assessors, tend to be very vested in the process. The assessment is paused at this stage as this level of control over the assessment process can be a challenging activity for students.

I ask the students if it is obvious to them what work should sit at the top and the bottom of the class. They generally agree on this but are often surprised at the amount of work that sits in the middle and that it is not obvious how to order this. Participants tend to recognise that this is where the discussions will need to begin and so the assessment process continues.

Panels of individuals often disagree over the judgement of work and there is a lot of negotiation and compromises. Trying to separate the work in the middle is problematic but is helped by measuring the work against the assessment rubric.

GRADE/ CRITERIA	Excellent 80-100% A	Very Good 70-80% B+	Good 60-70% B	Above Average 55-60% B-	Fair 50-55% C+	Fail advisory 40-50% C-
Reference	Anatomy detailed correctly	Anatomy detail similar to model	Anatomy details marked out, but lacking 3d depth/detail	Anatomy missing minor elements of the body. Areas of body imagined	Anatomy missing major elements of the body	Anatomy entirely incorrect
Proportional Accuracy	Perfectly human like	Believably human	General human form present. However scale incorrect (+/big/small)	Scale distorted, sections of the body disproportionate to other areas	A cartoon-like looking human	Not a recognisable
Weight & Composition	Figure is grounded, looks solid and as if it is standing	Figure is solid, but centre of gravity slightly off balance	Figure is believable, but centre of gravity is off balance	The figure looks stable from one point of view, but not from all other viewpoints	Figure looks like it's falling/ very off balance	Cannot stand up
Quality & Finish	Clear sharp precise, fully finished showing variety of clay finishes	Believable and considered, fully finished showing variety of clay finishes	Competent, showing a range of textures and depth, but lacks finish/polish	Has rudimentary depth and texture, but lacks finish/polish	Lacks surface finish, looks plain and un-textured	No finesse or finish visible

Table 1: Rubric for Assessment

Using the assessment rubric helps the students to understand the following:

- Some grades have larger percentile bandwidth than others.
- Although some pieces of work meet all the criteria, the sum of the parts does not always make an entirely successful piece of work.
- Objectivity in grading is not difficult to achieve and favouritism is less of an issue than they thought it would be.
- Thinking of words (excellent/good/fair) to adjudicate the work is easier than applying grades or percentages.

When the student assessment has finished a small group of students from the year above are invited to quality assure the decisions our assessors have made.

Stage 5 - Feedback

A feedback discussion takes place several days after the project is complete. This is a group discussion and is led largely by students who reflect on the project. They talk about the assessment, the overall results, their placement in the class and critical observation/possible improvements on the roll out of the module.

Results/Findings/Feedback

The students have experienced the challenge of a panel assessment, learned to present an argument for/against a work and understand what we the lecturers do as regular assessors of their work. They are surprised how involved this manner of enquiry is and yet enjoy the pursuit. This technique relies on the student being committed to partake in a process, which they may not be comfortable with initially. The students are surprised at their ability to use their critical faculty in order to classify the work.

This module is about enhancing modelling competencies. However, the learning developed by the assessment method also facilitates the development of critical thinking skills and the ability to self-evaluate. I have noticed a maturity in the approach to the latter part of the module. Having to grade their own work and that of others has led to a marked improvement in how they proceed into the second component of the module. They get the fundamental elements of it right far quicker. Although I would expect students to be more confident in their approach to the second half of the module, by inducting students into the assessment process their enhanced skills contribute to their capability to evaluate the quality of their own work from inception to final execution.

The most notable change is that the students are not giving up as easily as in the past. It is evident that they are keen to push themselves harder. Standards improve, they finish earlier than expected, present more complete work and display an awareness of quality.

The reflection of one of the current 2019 Year Two Students bears out some of the observations I have made

‘Being aware of the fact that my work would be criticised by a group rather than just one or two people added a powerful dynamic to the learning process. It forced me to look at my work from the perspective of my peers and to imagine what inaccuracies - or accuracies - would be pointed out. This encouraged me to identify and address problem areas rather than accepting them and moving on.

Though uncomfortable at times, working towards self-assessment guided me to work with self-discipline and integrity. This ultimately produced a higher standard of work and a new respect and knowledge for implementing self-awareness and self-criticism throughout the work process and not only after the work is complete.’

This approach meets the criteria associated with Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018) principles in that it allows for the following:

- Fosters collaboration and community
- Promotes expectations and beliefs that optimise motivation
- Develops self-assessment and reflection

Advice for Implementation

While the example here is connected to the act of sculpting the human form, the approach has applicability across a variety of disciplines. Many fields have practical elements that need teaching and assessment. Skills are necessary. At times, it can be challenging to ensure that higher level thinking can be accomplished through teaching technical process orientated modules. The approach I have taken has allowed me to “to induct students into the art of making appraisals in a substantive and comprehensive way” Sadler (2009) and hopefully has encouraged higher level thinking among the student cohort.

Reflective self-assessment of this manner and actively engaging students in the assessment process creates an opportunity for critical high-level thinking to happen in modules which are focussed on improving technical skills.

Points to consider:

- Essays, presentations, posters etc. can all be ranked by students although the specific process and timings may differ.
- It is important to provide students with guidance and a rubric or lexicon when performing self and peer assessment.
- Some students may feel that this process makes them anxious and this should be taken in to consideration - the differing roles students can take on will help with this.
- The feedback discussion is crucial to allow students to 'debrief' on the process and continually develop each iteration of the assessment.

References and Resources

CAST (2018). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2*. Retrieved from <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>, (7 March 2019)

Sadler R. (2009) '*Transforming Holistic Assessment and Grading into a Vehicle for Complex Learning*' in Joughin, G (ed.), *Assessment, Learning and Judgement in Higher Education*, Springer Science+Business Media B. V. Available at <https://cloudfront.ualberta.ca/-/media/centre-for-teaching-and-learning/symposium/less-teaching-more-learning-2009/royce-sadler/articles/symposiumltmlroyce-sadlertransforming-holistic-assessment-and-grading-into-a-vehicle-for-complex-learning.pdf>, (7 March, 2009)

