

USING DISCUSSION BOARDS TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC WRITING

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KEYWORDS

Discussion board, academic writing skills, writing for assessment

SUMMARY

Discussion boards are used in a module in the BA Childhood Practice for students to practice writing in a formal academic voice.

Students were asked to complete a few of the weekly discussion board tasks in a formal academic style. These posts were 'marked' by staff who would be commenting on e.g. language, critical analysis and referencing

Students enjoyed the experience and pass rate have improved

CONTEXT

The BA in Childhood Practice is a fully online degree programme taught entirely using the Blackboard VLE. Most students on the course are practitioners and managers working in childcare across Scotland who are studying part time.

Contemporary Issues in Childhood Practice is a level 9 module within the programme which explores current childcare theory, practice and policy. The module is many students' first academic experience for some time as a large proportion of students articulate directly into the final year of the degree (using prior experience and learning). There are two assessments on the module: A plan for a research report (20%); research report (80%)

WHAT, WHERE?

As part of the module, students are expected to post their thoughts on the discussion board every week. A different thread is created for each week's content and teaching staff respond to the students' comments. For 2013/14 a few threads were designated as 'formal discussions' and students were asked to post in an academic style. In turn staff responded formally to each student's post commenting on aspects such as critical analysis, use of source material and referencing.

WHY?

Comments from previous years indicated that students had been surprised by the critical nature of the comments they received on their assessed work. They noted that this contrasted with the informal and uncritical tone adopted by staff on the discussion board.

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DID IT WORK?

Many students commented positively on the formal discussion boards. Students found it a valuable learning process and were really happy to have the opportunity to get feedback on their writing prior to submitting the final assessment. Pass rates were improved as all students who submitted both parts of the assessment passed the module.

WAS IT WORTH IT?

There was very little extra work involved in making this change as staff already took an active part in weekly discussion boards. Staff took a bit more time to give full responses to students in the 'formal' threads.

If you wish to submit your own case study, or have any questions about this resource please contact:

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