Facilitative reviews tend to …	The 'invested' reviewer
• Begin with an articulation of strengths	• Encouraging tone
• Acknowledge the work expended	• Voice of mentor
• Identify concerns and perceived shortcomings	• Comments presented as dialogue with writer (e.g., asking questions, seeking clarification or elaboration)
• Suggest options	• Attention to the process of writing and the manuscript as a draft (next step is revision)
• Express optimism	• Formative feedback
• Motivate	• Substantive, actionable feedback

Table 1 Fostering the quality of academic writing

But the small conversations springing up informally are what count, and we need to increase the passing knowledge of the literature. Maryellen Weimer recently wrote about the importance of these impromptu and informal conversations, pointing out that we are often unprepared for them. We need a critical mass of academics having a reasonable knowledge of SoTL literature so that we have people 'spreading the virus' in their daily encounters.

Do you see continuous growth in international organisations such as the International Consortium on Educational Development (ICED) and the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL)?

If there is to be rapid growth of ICED and ISSoTL, it will likely not be in the countries where the organisations are already well-established, but in places like Southern Africa and through movements such as 'SoTL in the south' to include many new players. While our capacity to grow is limited in countries such as Canada and Australia, there is a potential to burgeon in some areas of the world.

How do you think small, local networks advance educational change?

Small networks emerge in any milieu. We all actually engage with our world with manageable size. They happen all over the place and they have the potential to affect what we do. Because there is an unstated influence, in Medicine we talk about the very real potential of harnessing this, and in Lund, Sweden, academics have decided to 'get serious' about harnessing this phenomenon.

Is there anything from your other life as a football coach that connected with your work as an academic?

Coaching football for me was a welcome escape from the demands of academic life and my academic development work. At the same time, there were striking similarities between the two pursuits. Most notably, each invited a developmental perspective. For any given player, her best game was the one she was yet to play. I like to think of our work as teachers in the same way.

In his Keynote speech to the annual conference of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Calgary, Canada, Gary Poole specified the many ways in which reviewers can and should play a positive role in fostering the abilities of academics to submit solid and useful manuscripts to teaching and learning journals (see Table 1).

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Seeking, hearing and acting: Staff perspectives of changes in assessment practice through TESTA

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Assessment and feedback continues to be a key focus of attention within higher education. The TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment) methodology has been used worldwide across a variety of disciplines, programmes and cultures with encouraging results (Jessop *et al.,* 2011; Jessop *et al.,* 2014a; Jessop *et al.,* 2014b; Boyle and Taylor, 2016).

This article shares the experience of using TESTA in a School of Health and Social Care within a higher education setting in Scotland to examine assessment practice and capture the experience of undergraduate nursing and midwifery. The main focus is the examination of the experiences and feedback of academic staff at 10 months and 21 months

post-changes in terms of the TESTA process. It also explores their professed challenges to, as well as their perceived benefits of, the modifications and changes that were introduced to module and programme assessment as a result of the findings from the TESTA audit. We share the findings from staff focus groups as well as some discussion about the staff journey in changing the student experience of assessment and feedback practices. We reflect on the learning from this project and make some recommendations for academic practice.

What we did

Programme leaders worked with researchers to examine current assessment practice in accordance with the TESTA toolkit, which comprises a document analysis audit, student surveys, and student focus groups. Undergraduate students in their second and third year of study, enrolled on either a nursing or midwifery programme, were asked to share their experiences of assessment and feedback thus far using the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (n= 476) and focus group discussions (n=7, 45 students). Quantitative data gathered as part of the TESTA audit was analysed using SPSS and qualitative data was subjected to thematic analysis.

The findings were in the main found to be similar to those found by other institutions in terms of student dissatisfaction with feedback and confusion in relation to what was required of them in an assessment (Jessop *et al.*, 2014b). Students also expressed lack of understanding as to the purpose and value of engaging in particular types of assessment. The findings showed a greater amount of summative assessment and less formative assessment in all fields of the nursing programmes as well as in the midwifery programme. Application of the TESTA methodology achieved its purpose in that it initiated discussion about assessment amongst staff within the School and acted as a vehicle and catalyst for change. Some academic staff, particularly those already involved in assessment and feedback enhancement activities, became engaged in the TESTA process and its findings eagerly and willingly; however, this did not appear to be the case for all staff and the project team were keen to understand the sense of hesitation towards changing assessment practices.

Feedback of the findings from the TESTA audit to teaching teams proved problematic due to competing priorities and a belief amongst some staff that change was not required. As a result, two away days were planned to provide academic staff with dedicated time to read the programme reports, discuss the findings within their teams, and to question the data and findings that were being presented to them.

From the away days, four priority areas were identified and working groups formed to act on the key findings:

- *Group One* developed guidance on giving feedback to students, aimed at achieving greater consistency across modules and programmes in relation to the student experience. The use of electronic software for marking and feedback was actively encouraged which allowed for greater transparency of practice and offered an opportunity for staff to learn from one another
- *Group Two* explored how clarity around the goals and standards for academic module assessments could be increased, thus supporting students in the expectations required of them as part of the assessment process
- *Group Three* created an evidence-based tool that mapped

assessment type in terms of strengths and weakness to discipline-specific graduate attributes. This tool was used to inform development of the assessment journey within the new undergraduate Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Midwifery programmes
- *Group Four* worked with colleagues based in clinical practice using action research on a project whose aim was to enhance feedback to students whilst on clinical placement.

As part of this project, staff were given the scope and indeed encouraged to make informed and evidence-based changes to their chosen module assessments in response to the findings. Changes included a reduction in the number of summative assessments within each module (previous common practice was two or more per 20-credit module), and a maximum wordage was set for written work within modules and programmes (a general reduction from 5000 words per 20-credit module to 3500 words). In order to ensure consistency and provide evidence for these changes, a benchmarking exercise was undertaken across the sector in relation to the number of summative assessments and word limit per 20-credit module. Subsequently, guidance was developed for academic staff, not just to ensure consistency of approach but to provide a coherent, equitable and comparable student experience in the assessment journey of their programmes.

Module leaders were asked to make specific changes to module assessments such as reducing the number of summative assessments to one and ensuring that a formative assessment approach featured in every module. A further change of practice focused around feedback on draft work of assessments by students. Previous practice was that students were entitled to submit a draft of their module assessments and academic staff would provide them with feedback (usually written) prior to the final required submission date of the summative assessment. A decision was made during the implementation of changes to cease this practice except for students in year one of the programmes, who would continue to receive feedback on individual drafts. It was decided during the away days that group and peer feedback would be introduced as students advanced through their programme of study in years two and three.

Following a period of eight months when a full cohort of students had experienced the changes, summative assessment module failure rates pre- and post-changes were examined within all modules. While one module saw a decrease in achievement of merits, across all 11 modules in the nursing degree programmes there were no statistically significant differences at any level of performance. The changes can therefore be stated to have had no impact, positive or negative, on the proportion of students withdrawing, failing, passing or earning a merit grade, which is encouraging given that the assessment load was reduced by around one-third.

Learning from the Staff Voice

As identified earlier, the team were keen to gain a greater understanding of staff views, perceptions and engagement with the data and subsequent implementation of the changes made to assessment practices and requirements. Focus groups were run with academic staff (although small in number) prior to the introduction of changes and post-introduction to changes. Although analysed and coded at

the time, the findings from the staff focus groups have been reanalysed to further explore any pivotal issues that we can learn regarding the introduction of change. Some key themes were identified within this data as follows (Table 1).

Staff Focus Group at 12 months post changes	Staff Focus Group at 21 months post changes
A sense of resistance to change	A recognition that change was indeed required
A sense of feeling powerless as an academic	A sense of feeling empowered as an academic
A sense of listening but not hearing	A sense of hearing and acting on the student voice
Anticipated poor student engagement	Problem solving and finding a way
Lack of confidence in skills and ability	Confidence that skills could be developed and training was available

Table 1 Key themes from the Staff Voice

Pressing on, versus all on-board

The student and programme data generated through TESTA demonstrated that students were over-assessed and that little formative assessment was included despite evidence of the benefit to student learning and the role this plays in clarity about goals and standards. Feedback from staff was collected at two stages. Firstly, at 12 months post-changes and then after 21 months. Signs of an interesting transition were apparent within the data gathered at the two points in the change trajectory.

After one year

The staff response to changes in assessment practice at this stage was mixed. Not all staff had engaged with the findings, so the ensuing changes appeared to come as a surprise to them. Staff who exhibited reluctance to make changes expressed a belief that students prefer two assessments to ensure that they pass. Others expressed concerns that changes had been imposed with 'no notification or anything', that the timing was wrong and should be delayed and there were anxieties about anticipated additional work for staff.

This was interesting since, in addition to evidence that students felt over-burdened by excessive assessment, staff were also weighed down by large marking loads which may in turn have contributed to poor staff engagement with the TESTA results and dialogue around the proposed changes in practice. Others opposed the request to make changes on the basis that current practice was believed to be best. The introduction of formative assessment produced anxiety around anticipated non-engagement and a possible associated increased student failure rate.

In contrast, however, other staff spoke of student delight in reduced summative assessment workload and shared examples of changes in formative feedback practice which were well received:

'I changed my feedback to audio this year, for the group feedback. The students loved it, they really did. Again,

they said, they felt it was more personal, they felt there was a connection, between formative and summative…'

Some staff also expressed concerns about being scrutinised and lacking the skills to deliver high quality feedback:

'You never really get taught how to give good feedback, and it's something, if you're lucky, you learn what works.'

'And I've been saying for ages, two years, we need to get together and have a workshop about how we're using [Turnitin] Grade Mark.'

After two years

The data gathered at this point was quite different from that collected the year before. Firstly, staff acknowledged the need to change:

'If you look across the continuum that the students were faced with – multiple and too many assessments – I could absolutely rationalise the change.'

The discussion amongst staff was also more student-centred:

'I like to give individualised feedback…I think it's tailored to the students so therefore it's more appropriate. I teach individualised care the whole time so how can I not do individualised education?'

The staff expressed commitment to finding new ways to engage students in assessment. They discussed grappling with innovative ideas and possibilities:

'It's a bit carrot and stick, if you remove the carrot or the stick, then it's hit or miss whether they'll get that or not.'

'I think engaged students are always engaged. It's how you engage students who perhaps don't see the need of what you're trying to get them to do. I structure the modules around about some way of ensuring that they're engaged with the content.'

There was also a sense of staff taking responsibility for their development which was different from the year before:

'To be honest, I feel I've been well supported from my colleagues and lots of opportunity to go onto training…'

Our reflections of the project

During this project, we have reflected on the many changes that have been made, the interactions with a large group of academic colleagues, our need to respond to the student voice and the findings from the TESTA audit, as well as our own contribution and approach to this project. As a result, we have identified some key learning:

- Identifying a need for the readiness to change – whilst in this project staff came around to the changes and indeed were supportive in their efforts to introduce change, we reflect that some time may have been well invested in preparing staff for the need for change in relation to the student experience of assessment and feedback (Rafferty et al., 2013). This was due in part to an evident tension between the advantages of waiting for all to 'come on board', with the urgency to address an unnecessary burden of excessive workload for staff and students. In

hindsight, waiting for greater 'change readiness' may have avoided this sense of imposed change (Rafferty *et al.,* 2013).

A hidden benefit of this reluctance was that discussions about assessment and feedback stayed live, and fuelled ongoing dialogue. This created a groundswell that caused staff on the perimeter to connect with the results and changes in practice (Ford *et al.,* 2008)

- Motivating and encouraging early champions – whilst this is something we did as a way of illuminating change to colleagues, it is our reflection that more support could have been put in place for these enthusiastic leaders. Some resistance to change from academic staff may have been as a result of not being able to see what 'different' could look like for both the staff themselves but, more importantly, for the student

- A stronger approach to student centredness – whilst there was no doubt in the heads of the project teams that we were trying to respond to the student voice, it is our belief that perhaps we could have done more to demonstrate a student-centred approach to our colleagues. Whilst the content of an academic module is created by a member of academic staff, the learning journey is the students'.

There was clear evidence from a range of sources of data that the student learning experience in relation to assessment was not as good as it could be. Yet in the rewriting of module assessment strategies, it is often easy to forget the role of the student or the voice of the student in the construction of assessment design (Hoidn, 2017)

- Unexpected factors – a decision to utilise TESTA was taken with support of the then Head of School. By the time data had been gathered and analysed, this position had changed and the communication of results from TESTA was initiated during a period of interim leadership. As a consequence, it was a time of instability and uncertainty within the School. This could not have been anticipated. Research shows that leadership is important during times of change and has a key role in the creation of a safe environment where staff can try new things (Kavanagh and Ashkanasy, 2006).

Recommendations for Academic Practice

Learning from this project has led the team to make the following recommendations for others who might be considering a similar process in relation to assessment and feedback:

1) TESTA can be a useful mechanism to examine current practice and implement improvements in response to the student voice. At its core, it encourages the academic community to talk to each other about assessment and feedback, which ultimately can lead to enhancements within the curriculum

2) Academic staff need to be empowered to make changes within their sphere of contribution to the curriculum so that a collective and collaborative approach to the student experience can be taken. In this experience, it became evident that 'top down'

approaches or methods that were perceived to be imposed were more likely to delay acceptance and, consequently, inhibited progress

3) The team was led by an academic within the School who also managed the implementation of the TESTA process. The advantages of this approach were evident in the understanding of the data − its application to all parts of both programmes and having direct experience in working with staff and students.

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