



## ESCalate Developing Pedagogy and Practice 2009 Grant Project Interim Report

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**Date submitted** 2 March 2011

**Project Title** Tipping out the Boot Grit: the use of on-going feedback devices to enhance feedback dialogue

**Project Leader** Dr Jan McArthur

**Institution** University of Edinburgh

**Partners**

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**Project Start date** 1 September 2010

**Project End date** 29 April 2011

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## **Interim Report – ESCalate small project grant, February 2011**

**Project title**            Tipping out the Boot Grit: the use of on-going feedback devices to enhance feedback dialogue

**Award holder**            Dr Jan McArthur, University of Edinburgh

### **Summary of project**

This project is premised on a belief in the importance of understanding feedback as a dialogue between students and teachers. In addition it considers the importance of feedback as an ongoing and multi-faceted part of students' engagement with a course, rather than a singular process that occurs at only one point. On this basis the project looks in-depth at two different moments in the learning cycle where feedback can be encouraged in a more dialogical way. Insights into these feedback devices, at these moments, can then be used to inform the development of other forms of dialogue through the learning cycle.

The first feedback example is situated in regular lectures – and we term this boot grit feedback. This is intended to provide an opportunity for dialogue between students and the lecturer about key concepts that remain unclear at the end of a lecture. Students are given the chance to ask confidentially for further information or clarification at the end of class, to which the lecturer responds promptly. The idea is to resolve misunderstandings or knowledge gaps that might not initially seem serious, but if left unresolved could “worry away” at the students' learning in negative way – like a bit of grit in a boot.

The second feedback example is situated in the context of a major piece of coursework. To try to inspire the notion of feedback as dialogue, students are given the opportunity to request feedback on particular aspects of their work when they submit it. Lecturers then pick up the dialogue with each student as they respond to their requests. Previous work in this area, by the same researchers, has indicated considerable resistance on the part of students to take up this offer. So this part of the project extends this work in a different context and in a slightly different way to consider what obstacles there may be to this form of dialogue, along with its potential benefits.

### **Progress to Date**

The first part of the project, looking at focused feedback at Edinburgh University, faced initial delays due to organizational restructuring that made it difficult to make the appropriate arrangements within the earlier part of the academic year. These problems have now been overcome and the work scheduled for November is now taking place. This is not expected to delay the overall completion of the project, as the team have responded by reorganizing what is done at what time, rather than simply waiting. It means that the bulk of the Research Assistant time will now be in the latter half of the project rather than the first half.

### Focused Feedback

So far data has been collected from nearly 400 students' essays, with a further 100 anticipated shortly. Initial analysis suggests this data provides interesting additional insights to the similar work undertaken at Napier University; in particular, a slightly higher uptake for the focused feedback option, but it remains low overall. Reasons for this are being explored.

### Boot Grit Feedback

The second part of the project, looking at instant feedback at Napier University, has progressed on time. So far this has drawn on 2 modules, involving 100+ students. Initial analysis suggests that this instant feedback mechanism is useful and has begun to identify the best ways in which it may be used within lectures and other teaching situations.

## **Future Stages**

### Focused Feedback

Data is still to be collected from more courses trialing the focused feedback. Most work now will turn to pulling together the data relating to requests for focused feedback and the impacts of this. In addition interviews with students to add complementary qualitative data are scheduled for later in March.

### Boot Grit

We will continue to trial this in courses at Napier University. In addition, more work is being done trying text walls in lectures to provide a similar instant and dialogical form of feedback as attempted through the 'low tech' boot grit idea.

Writing up for both parts of the project will take place during April. Project members have scheduled time for this.

We have put in a proposal for the Assessment in Higher Education conference at Carlisle in July 2011 – at which we plan to disseminate our results. In addition we plan to prepare a resource for the ESCalate website and this work will contribute to a journal article in an international peer reviewed journal.

## **Impacts on original project plan**

Institutional changes at Edinburgh University have affected the order in which parts of this project have been able to be completed. However it is not anticipated now that this will affect the overall outcomes.

We have been pleasantly surprised by the number of students we have been able to involve in the research cohort so far – this does not appear to have been adversely affected by the delays.

## **Costs so Far**

This institutional circumstances at Edinburgh have prevented us processing the research assistant funding as early as originally intended. But this is now underway. We do not anticipate any changes in the costings provided with the application.

JMcA