

## What is a Patchwork Texts approach to curriculum and assessment in HE?

The Patchwork Text (PT) approach is a blend of several things. It is an attempt to take account of the *variety of different* ways in which individual students learn and are able to present their learning. It is also a coursework format in which a set of short pieces of writing or 'patches' is built up gradually, week by week. Each patch can be shared with other students in small group discussions. The format may require different kinds of writing e.g. a story, a reflection on a personal experience, a book review, a commentary on a lecture, the application of a particular theory to a specific piece of professional practice, notes from a field trip, etc. to represent diverse kinds of learning and/or content in the module. Increasingly, electronic media are being used to diversify the forms of expression and communication of learning. This aspect of PT enables a student to express their knowing in a range of ways. It can also facilitate students' process of *self-exploration* and *self-questioning*, to make explicit the nature of their learning 'journey' as a form of personal engagement with the course content, particularly if one of the requirements is to keep a reflective journal. The PT approach can require a sharing of patches, to encourage collaborative learning and formative peer feedback, to enrich the learning process and develop a *learning community*. These pedagogical aspects imply particular kinds of planning and organisation of content and time. The PT assignment produced at the end of the module for summative assessment is a composite text based on each student's own patches, with a requirement for some kind of integrative writing or 'stitching'. This is usually a reflective, unifying commentary which draws on further reading, including other students' patches, to produce a personal synthesis which addresses the main aims of the module. A powerful resource for creating a cohesive structure for the PT and the writing of the stitching is the student's reflective journal or Blog, kept throughout the module.

The idea of the Patchwork Text is partly a response to perceived difficulties in assignment formats such as the essay or the portfolio. The essay focuses on a relatively narrow range of skills and presents a time-consuming task at the end of a module. Students writing the essay well before the end may not attend later sessions, while those who leave the task and do it in a rush, in stressful conditions, do not achieve their potential. Such situations foster an instrumental and selective attitude to the ideas presented in the course, some of the characteristics of the well known approach in HE called *surface learning*. The portfolio solves these problems but creates others as it usually lacks a requirement to create an overall synthesis, and is thus suspected in many quarters of being an easy option, and an inadequate basis for demonstrating academic achievement.

The Patchwork Text draws on several theoretical dimensions, including a constructivist theory of meaning and an interactionist theory of teaching and learning. It also expresses a democratic-political purpose: to encourage explicitly an assignment format in which students can draw upon a broader range of abilities to embody their understanding, and thus to enable greater diversity and inclusiveness in HE, broadening access to qualifications for a wider range of students. It fosters an honesty of students' presentation of ideas by making explicit the *uncertainty* and subjectivity of our understanding, rather than prompting the pretence (as in an essay format) of having *mastered* a new (for them) field of study. It legitimates the dynamic quality of personal knowledge as always in a state of becoming. It also creates explicit opportunities for students to learn from and through dialogue with each other as well as with the tutor, and to reflect on a range of learning experiences and diverse theoretical resources, so as to create their own personal links and create their own meaning for their own purposes. These are prominent features of *deep learning*.

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