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CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT AND MULTIMODAL APPROACHES – INNOVATIVE MEDIA PEDAGOGIES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate and understand the contribution of innovative pedagogies in media education through empirical findings from the classroom that emerges out of a reflective practice. Media education in the twenty-first century is about innovation, creative engagement and social thinking. One can interpret media education from two perspectives- one, where media is used in teaching, two, media used for learning. This paper argues that when constructively aligned outcome based teaching and learning is combined with the multimodal approaches in media education, it enhances assignment output of the students and has the potential to transcend geographical boundaries. For students of 21st century, technology has proved to be their natural learning habitat. As teachers we need to be supportive and adaptive of these changes by engaging innovatively with the technologies. Even in the 21st century we find a cultural divide among the teaching populace in embracing multimodality. Hence, it is essential to be mindful of the 'digital native' and 'digital immigrant debate'. The research has a constructivist grounding and takes a phenomenological approach. The paper uses data from undergraduate classroom and critically analyses the engagement of the cohort. This paper focuses on the Public Relations modules at undergraduate level for year 2 and 3.

INTRODUCTION

Media studies, at every level, are experiencing a transformation owing to the digital media development. This transformation is impacting the way media studies have been traditionally perceived in the realm of Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver-Effect (SMCRE) model. It is inextricably complex with the technical and semantic influences in the digital era. The situation demands a shift in media pedagogy to address these divergent and convergent occurrences so as to have wider implications in the broad spectrum of media and communications, as an academic discipline and a professional field. Now is the time for collaboration, knowledge sharing, technological innovations, supported by a strong pedagogical foundation that can come by integrating teaching and technology (Fernback, 2015). The rest of the paper constructs a qualitative narrative on the philosophy and approach to

teaching in media studies, followed by conceptualising the Innovation, Creative engagement and Social thinking (ICEST) framework. The study expands on the ICEST operations and drivers based on the undergraduate classroom experience of teaching Public Relations from a media and communications perspective, involving students in year two and three levels at De Montfort University. The central argument in this paper emphasises on a socio-cultural approach to teaching and learning by constructing a reflective account on a year practice.

Philosophy and approach to teaching and learning: It is crucial to establish mutual confidence and respect between teachers and learners to create a supportive learning environment. This learning space should then provide opportunity for the students to construct knowledge devoid of any mental resistance or dilemma. It is essential that we minimise the 'passage from knowing to understanding and to feeling and vice versa from feeling to understanding and to knowing' Gramsci (2011). This can help addressing the power relationship, often enforced institutionally, between teachers

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and learners, and are detrimental to construction of knowledge. There is one small key to achieve this successful working relationship that can help reshape and determine our teaching and learning prospect. We need to create an interactive working space involving debates, discussions, and lots of communication to feed us intellectually. This space can be created by stimulating, inspiring, and instilling enthusiasm within students, providing them opportunity to challenge conventions by supportive rationales to develop their critical thinking. *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (Freire, 1987) explains why sometimes it is invaluable to talk a book, enter into a dialogue and then include 'the possible readers of this conversation' in the dialogue, as 'that dialogue is itself creative and re-creative'. This enhances students' learning experience. After all, they come to university for an overall development and not a factional gain. As educators, it is our responsibility to foster students' emotional engagement with the subject area. It is also important that we value their existing knowledge and the social influences when they are in the classroom. This paper views teaching and learning as a constructivist and socio-cultural process where understanding and constructing, a meaning is an active method and has socio-cultural influences (Young, 2004). Learners construct their knowledge through active enquiry. In addition, supporting collaboration in the classroom assists in constructing knowledge. Constructivism is about respecting individual learners and their social context. In addition, this process also demands an integrated approach to academic practice by committing to continuous professional development.

Conceptualizing Innovation, Creative engagement and Social thinking (ICEST): Applying innovation, creative engagement and social thinking (ICEST) framework through curriculum design, based on social constructivist approach (Vygotsky, 1978), can create learning communities that are vital for twenty-first century educational institutions. Teaching in classroom ought to ensure 'social and emotional support, thus enabling learners to take risk and develop ownership of their learning' (Beck, Kosnik, and Kosnick, 2006). This eventually has a sustainable impact on the quality of teaching and learning, where interaction enhances the scope for knowledge sharing. Interactions in classroom can range from argumentation to self-reflection, depending on the pedagogical approach taken in delivering the content. This is where constructive alignment and multimodal approach, as mentioned above, becomes absolutely necessary in achieving learning outcomes for a particular session. The ICEST framework gains inspiration from Freire (2007), Gramsci (2011) and Vygotsky (1978) and aims to embed 'practice of freedom' in education, minimise power relationship and view learning as integral to development. The framework acknowledges social learning and emphasises on construction of knowledge socially. Innovation in any form cannot be neutral but inherits constituents from socio-cultural, historical and economic contexts. Again, since knowledge is constructed within a set of values and successful intelligence can be conceptualised 'within a socio-cultural context' (Sternberg, 2007:42), therefore encouraging social thinking within a discipline, through teaching and learning, can amplify the potential for innovation. This process involves creative engagement and endeavours to achieve a balance between teacher and students contribution in the classroom. The ICEST framework aims to achieve the aforesaid balance by viewing learners as constructors and creators involving phases of research to optimise the potential of the students to achieve

learning outcomes by the end of a module or a programme. The ICEST framework was developed and applied in the classroom for teaching Public Relations at undergraduate level in year 2 and 3. The cohort size was 81. The initial approach was to thematically arrange the lecturers and take a holistic approach while delivering the content in lectures, followed by seminars and workshops. Both the lectures and the workshops were supported by academic and professional materials. The students were encouraged to combine academic and professional sources while completing their assignments. This way they were able to construct knowledge not only theoretically but also professionally which also serves the purpose of employability. Secondly, it was important to redesign the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO's) so as to achieve constructively aligned outcome based teaching and learning. Thirdly, it was important to engage with different external organisations to enhance the scope for student placement and internship, during and after the course. This integration between academic and professional institutions build trust within the student community, as they not only observe but gets directly involved in the process and benefits from securing some form of tangible outcome as a result of their learning at institutions. The institution also receives a positive feedback from the cohort that then raises university reputation, impacting future student recruitment.

Requisites for ICEST operations in classroom: ICEST framework has been immensely successful when applied to teaching and learning Public Relations, during the previous academic year, that was reflected in student feedback. The framework can achieve best outcomes under five conditions – (1) Restructuring ILOs (appendix 5) and designing constructively aligned (CA) outcome based teaching and learning; (2) Reflective practice (appendices 1 and 2) and Transformative reflection model (appendix 3), that involves teachings SWOT analysis on a weekly basis (appendix 4); (3) Active learning; (4) Multimodal approaches; and (5) Continuous Professional development (CPD). However, this is not an exhaustive list and depending on pedagogical approaches, the framework may benefit from further inputs.

Restructuring ILOs and the role of Constructive Alignment (CA): In States, there is growing discussion on PR curricula and the expectations of PR practitioners in the industry (Hardin and Pompper, 2004). Now since the world is increasingly becoming a global village, hence while working in the industry and learning from students' job interview experiences, a gap was noticed between the module content and the market expectations. Hence, it was vital to address this gap by restructuring the ILOs (Appendix 5). This is imperative to students learning experiences as then it helps them to formulate their understanding on skills and expertise gained from the course. Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are central to the design of teaching and assessment. It is vital that students become aware of the knowledge they will acquire from the module. In other words, students should know if they are going to acquire declarative or functional knowledge or both (Biggs and Tang, 2011). Accordingly, the focus was on the SOLO and Bloom's revised taxonomy verbs (Biggs and Tang, 2011) to design the assignments and identify verbs that can serve the purpose, keeping in mind that the structural complexity should be incremental. Constructive Alignment (CA) is about aligning teaching in a way so that the students can construct their knowledge and understanding in the subject area through 'relevant learning activities' (Biggs and Tang,

2011: 51-52), to demonstrate their achievement of Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) (appendix 7). The lecturers' task is to create a learning environment for the students by designing a curriculum that augments quality-learning conditions. The teaching methods and the assessment tasks are the key components of this learning process and should be 'aligned with the learning activities assumed in the intended outcomes' (Biggs, n.d.). As Biggs argues that, teachers should also be aware about the derivative and functional knowledge (Biggs and Tang, 2011). Any module or course should aim for imparting not only the secondary knowledge that is there in the field but should enable the students to understand and demonstrate the knowledge by achieving the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) at the highest level. The four key steps in the process, as defined by Biggs (n.d.) are, defining the ILOs, selecting the teaching and learning activities, assessing students' outcomes and finally grading the work. One of the greatest contribution by Biggs is the structure of the observed learning outcome, better known as the SOLO taxonomy that 'classifies learning outcomes in terms of their structural quality, which makes it useful for defining levels of understanding, which in turn may be used for specifying such levels when writing learning outcomes' (Biggs and Tang, 2011, p.81). The SOLO taxonomy emphasises on quantitative and qualitative changes in the students learning which gradually becomes complex on progression by proficiently completing the academic tasks (Biggs and Tang, 2011). This taxonomy can be used while designing the ILOs to measure the student levels and the output levels on completion. The five different levels of the taxonomy are Prestructural, Unistructural, Multistructural, Relational and Extended abstract, which also identifies a 'hierarchy of verbs' that can be used while designing the ILOs (Biggs and Tang, 2011, pp.91-92; Brabrand and Dahl, 2008) (Appendix 8). The ILOs in Public Relations I module (year 2, level 5) was designed accordingly (Appendix 5).

The lectures and seminars/workshops in both terms supported and promoted active learning in classroom (as in the presentation slides and reflection). Students worked both individually and in groups. The three assignments for Public Relations I module were essay, PR campaign plan, and Group presentation. Before the first assignment, students gained knowledge about theories and practices in the field but did not know how to apply these in real scenarios (mostly quantitative phase). The second and third assignments required gaining skills and hence there were sessions that are more practical. The main difference in approach between the last two assignments was the brief. For second assignment, students worked on the provided brief (quantitative and qualitative phase) but for the third assignment students worked in groups to construct a brief for their own company campaign (qualitative phase). Therefore, the third stage was about total freedom in thinking and application. Students received marking criteria tailored to specific assignments, which helped them in the meaning making process. The feedback was positive. Students also received formative and summative feedback on all the assignments. Again this provided the scope for a dialogue which eventually minimised the power relation in the classroom.

Transformative reflection in Teaching: Reflective teaching, or to be more specific, Transformative reflection in teaching, embodies critical review of our teaching experiences (Dewey, 1933) and questioning frames of reference (Wiessnerand

Mezirow, 2000). Accordingly, the Transformative Reflection model was developed to reflect scientifically on the lectures, seminars and workshops (appendices1 and 2). In teaching profession, it is essential to stand before not an ordinary but Snow White mirror (Biggs and Tang, 2011). In other words one needs to trust that any failure, dissatisfaction, frustration in teaching and learning environment, can be transformed upon reflection into effective practice. Therefore the 'multi-stage process of: reflect-plan-apply-evaluate' (Biggs and Tang, 2011) has been central to the teaching philosophy. This process initiated in early term 1 (October-December 2015) with student feedback, which was taken three times in course commencing week, first and third month respectively. Secondly, it was imperative to identify personal strengths and contexts by applying SWOT analysis (Appendix 4) to all the delivered lectures, seminars and workshops in both terms.

Active Learning: Our role as an individual in this world is not a passive one. Active/Cooperative learning is about Integration, which according to Freire (2007) can be distinguished from adaptation. The students engage in the process of creation and re-creation, responds to challenges, questions everything, and then integrates themselves into their context. If students learn to follow the prescription by others then they will eventually lose their freedom and would not be able to make rational choices in the end. It is important to remember as Freire (2007) mentioned that an integrated person is a subject whereas the adaptive person becomes an object. Active learning can assist in transforming the students from being spectators and listeners to constructors and creators. Active learning is a non-traditional approach. It is important that diffident students also perceive modules or courses to be welcoming and inclusive, and most importantly, they trust that they can learn. The embedded learning activities required active learning and using technology in an innovative way. The seminars/workshops were tasked in a way so that they require both individual and group engagement. This also gradually prepared them for the final assignment group work. They learnt to face challenges while participating in these group work activities and hence the final assignment was still though a bit challenging, but the students enjoyed the challenge and the module received 96.7% positive feedback from students. MEDS2010 module had 56 students, a combination of joint and single honours. Ten of them decided to do media dissertation on PR in their 3rd year (level 6); three of them secured an internship; two of them secured a placement in one of the leading PR firms, three of them went for short-term work experience that ranged from a day to a week. The non-traditional approach to teaching played a significant role in the process. One of the most challenging areas in teaching is to minimize the power relationship between teachers and students, which in most cases is institutional. Teaching experience suggests students perform better if they question continuously rather than learn by wisdom. It is momentous to engage in a dialogue with the students to enhance their learning potential and critical thinking.

Multimodal Approaches: Today most or majority of the university students' use smart technologies to learn and communicate. Hence it was important that the module assignments, content, information are shared using innovative technologies. Secondly, in today's world of continuous technological change it is vital that we as lecturers create a learning environment that helps enhance learning by using

technologies. This is also a requirement for most of the jobs in PR. Accordingly during the seminars and workshops discussion were organized on how technologies are helping to develop interpersonal relationship, B2B, B2C and B2P relationship and the world is becoming connected so easily. This interaction or dialogic exercise facilitated students to think creatively. While doing their group assignments all the groups used some form of technology to communicate creatively. This promoted participatory learning and students who were away during Easter managed to communicate and share information with their groups. They used online group working spaces like Google docs, Prezi to mention a few. VLE module shell (Blackboard) was extensively used to communicate and provide information to students like reminders of assignments, assignment structure, and job information. The marking was online (appendix 6); hence it was convenient for the students to access their grades in their own time, with no institutional barrier whatsoever. Panopto software was used to record student presentations and provide feedback, which they could also take to their job interviews, to demonstrate certain skills that they have gained at university. The idea for next year is to introduce mobile applications that are used by professionals in the field. Students can use them both in iOS and Android. This year the studentstaking a step further, to annotate the lecture notes to create a live environment where students are not receivers anymore, but become active contributors. However, we need to ensure that technologies used for these purposes should be easily accessible, intuitively designed in order to enhance outcome. It was also important that instructions were provided regarding the use of technology in sessions as technology has the power to distract and derail individuals. Hence creating a supportive learning environment is absolutely vital. It is about respecting each other and students did understand this very well. Technology made learning enjoyable in the classroom and helped overcome physical barrier to teaching and learning. However even in the 21st century we find a cultural divide among the populace in embracing multimodality. So it is necessary to be mindful of the 'digital native' and 'digital immigrant debate'. While introducing this within teaching discipline initially one may need to negotiate in order to minimise the gap. We cannot stop students from recording lectures so we can integrate even adapt non-linear approaches to address the needs of our students. Teaching is not about transmission but it is about scaffolding and supporting this process of personalised knowledge creation. Hence as Holmes and Gardner (2006) suggests, 'communal constructivism' using technology is the way forward. Therefore it is important that we start considering online learning technologies as learning sites rather than tools to make our lives easier.

Integrating academic practice: Finally, continuous professional development (CPD), one of the vital elements of integrated approach to academic practice, can increase the potential of the teachers. CPD not only ensures effective contribution within school but also facilitates student outcomes that ensure remit of quality teaching at universities (Bubb and Earley, 2007; Neil and Morgan, 2003). Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education at De Montfort University provides the scope for tutor, peer and mentor observations (Teaching observations as reflective practice, Appendix 3) that give an opportunity to reflect on teaching based on the feedback received from the observers.

All these five conditions when applied with the ICEST framework transcends both teaching and learning enthusiasm within a classroom.

Prospect for future research: Findings from this paper suggest that media education can benefit from future research work on pedagogic transitions and internationalisation of higher education. Firstly, constructively aligned outcome based teaching and learning, if used as a tool in media education can supersede negative connotations attached to internationalisation of the higher education in a globalised world. Secondly, constructive alignment when used along with the multimodal approaches, improves the quality of delivery in lectures and students benefit from achieving the learning outcomes not only for the benefit of their academic qualification but also its application in the external job market. Globalisation, though ubiquitous now, has initiated a challenge for higher education globally. Often globalisation is linked with exerting power over the countries in transition involving cultural homogenisation (Yang, 2003) which not only surpasses but also overlooks national boundaries creating a 'fear of homogenisation' (Lingard and Rizvi, 1998; Scott, 2000). It is debatable whether this fear accepts the end of plurality globally or it attempts to suggest the obtainable balance between the local and global. However, evidences suggest that the global exchanges so far are mostly unequal and unfavourable for the countries in transition. However, if we view, globalisation of education in the light of internationalising educational framework, in a 'desire for, and the capacity to build, meaningful communities' globally (Shapiro, 1998), then the pedagogical approaches has the potential to bring the international community's closer on the basis of shared practice to benefit media education at large. In the age of media convergence, media education requires innovative design to ensure creative engagement and international collaboration. It is time to address the issue of global pedagogies and curriculum design in media education. This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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**Appendix 1 Overall Reflection Template (weekly)**

Weekly Teaching Reflection 2015/16 MEDS2010
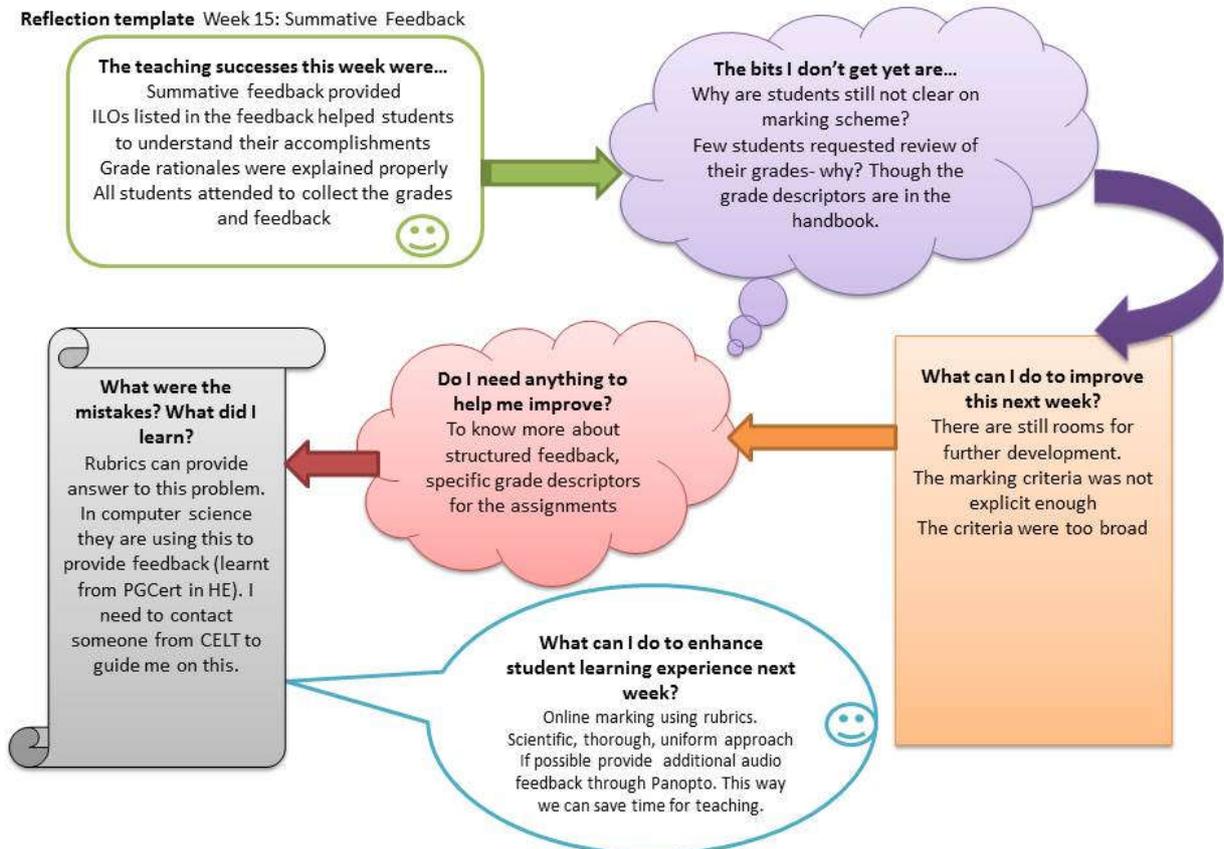
Appendix 2. Reflection on content and required action: Workshop: Social Media PR: Storytelling and Engagement Strategies

Session description	Content	Positives and required changes
This workshop demonstrated through case studies how digital technology is being incorporated into online campaigns.	Focused mainly on how social media has influenced PR profession. It also covered the influences of social media on PR strategy and planning, the eight new practices that has evolved because of social media, engagement strategies, storytelling through social media. Because of student feedback, tutor and mentor observation feedback (appendix 5), this term more examples were used in related areas. In this session students watched videos and learnt to analyse the campaigns working individually first and then within groups. Individually they produced self-promotional strategies and identified what influenced their purchasing strategies. Then in-group they entered into a dialogue with their peer to find out the difference. This exercise was for assignment 2. Then as learning set exercise, they started developing a blog, create their company, design logo, construct a slogan, and examined the social media strategy for a company.	Some of the content changes required: change in power relationship because of social media/ public empowerment; influence of social media on political public relations; professional apps and tools used in the industry; researching social media impact in public relations. Secondly, students' informal feedback in the class suggested that they found it complex to work together on two assignments. I realised that this has more to do with the instructions rather than changing the working pattern. This is also, where the active learning and the constructive alignment started working hand in hand. Now since the degree of freedom in the final assignment was enormous in compared to the previous two assignments, so it took them a while to understand how working on two assignments simultaneously could make their life easier.

Appendix 3. Transformative Reflection model
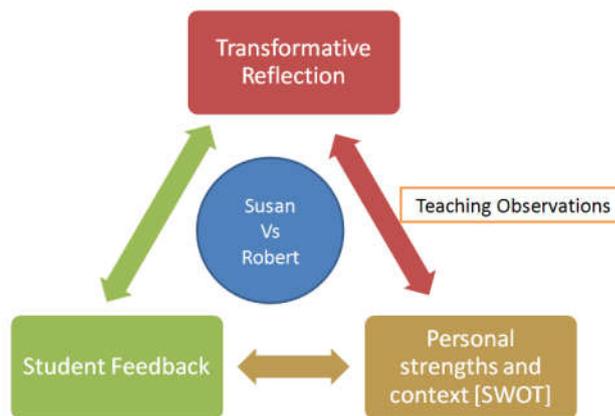
Appendix 4 Teaching SWOT Log

Appendix 5 Public Relations, Year 2, Level 5, Intended Learning Outcome

Previous Learning outcomes 2015-16

1 The ability to demonstrate awareness and show understanding of a range of key concepts and debates around public relations in society and how these apply to public relations practice.

2 To demonstrate an ability to learn and recognise the application of digital communications and social media in the pursuit of strategic communications.

3 Produce basic public relations creative written work evaluated against standards appropriate to current practice.

4 To demonstrate awareness and understanding of critical ideas around the relationship between public relations and the media, and appreciate the implications for practice.

Learning outcomes 2016-17

A. **To advance understanding and knowledge of-**
1. Key concepts and debates in Public Relations
2. Theories into practice- research in public relations
3. Public relations, advertising and marketing- in the world of IMC
4. The production of discourse in public relations- socio-cultural turn in public relations
5. Communication for social transformation- how public relations operates in micro or community level
6. Relevance of pragmatism and semiotics in public relations
7. Critical ideas around the relationship between public relations and the media, and appreciate the implications for practice.

B. **The ability to-**
1. Learn and recognise the application of digital communications and social media in the pursuit of strategic communications
2. Apply tools to specific scenarios
3. Analyse internal and external factors that influence decision making in public relations
4. Construct public relations campaign
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of public relations campaign
6. Identify and propose a solution in public relations campaign

C. **Developing and transferring skills and expertise in-**
1. Writing press releases- traditional and contemporary
2. Creating blogs and promotional materials
3. Research, Research Methods and data analysis in public relations
4. Individual and Group working
5. Managing time and dealing with work loads
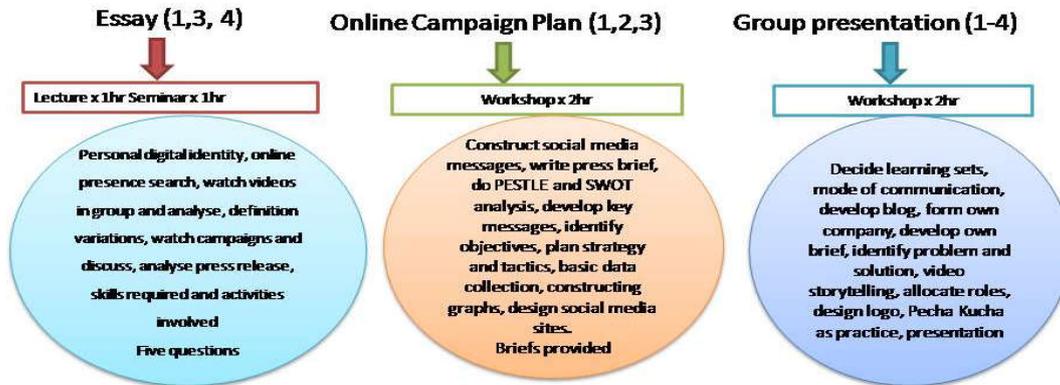6. Written and verbal communication with creative insights

Appendix 6: Marking Criteria (Rubrics on Turnitin)

	Fail		Marginal Fail	Marginal Pass	Pass	Merit	Distinction	
Criteria	0-29%	30-44%	45-49%	50-54%	55-59%	60-69%	70-84%	85-100%
Response to brief/relevance *How well is the brief responded to?*	Little or no evidence of understanding of the question	Irrelevant to the question OR mostly descriptive and/or does not directly address the question	Rather descriptive or derivative; Partially addressed the question	Moderate understanding addressed to the question	Competent understanding addressed to the question	Good understanding directly addressed to the question	Depth of understanding directly addressed to the question	Extended Knowledge going well beyond taught materials addressing the brief.
Structure/Appropriate language *Is there an appropriate structure to the presentation with a clear introduction/executive summary and contents*	Poorly expressed, hindering the reader's understanding, improperly presented or little content	Errors of structure such that the work has very little focus or argument	Difficult to understand some of the points being made. Poor structure and layout	Content suitably organised & presented Some structural inconsistencies; potentially weak transitions; potentially poor use of paragraphs/transitions	Overall, accurately &clearly written/ presented;	Generally well structured; few structural inconsistencies; easily understood arguments	Structured appropriately to the purpose of the assignment and well presented.	Well structured; coherent arguments, well presented. Only minor errors.

Appendix 7 Aligning ILO's with assignments and learning activities

MEDS2010, Year 2, Level 5, Cohort size:56

1. The ability to **demonstrate** awareness and show understanding of a range of key concepts and debates around public relations in society and how these apply to public relations practice.

2. To **demonstrate** an ability to learn and recognise the application of digital communications and social media in the pursuit of strategic communications.

3. **Produce** basic public relations creative written work evaluated against standards appropriate to current practice.

4. To **demonstrate** awareness and understanding of critical ideas around the relationship between public relations and the media, and appreciate the implications for practice.

Essay (1,3, 4)	Online Campaign Plan (1,2,3)	Group presentation (1-4)
Lecture x 1hr Seminar x 1hr	Workshop x 2hr	Workshop x 2hr
Personal digital identity, online presence search, watch videos in group and analyse, definition variations, watch campaigns and discuss, analyse press release, skills required and activities involved. Five questions	Construct social media messages, write press brief, do PESTLE and SWOT analysis, develop key messages, identify objectives, plan strategy and tactics, basic data collection, constructing graphs, design social media sites. Briefs provided	Decide learning sets, mode of communication, develop blog, form own company, develop own brief, identify problem and solution, video storytelling, allocate roles, design logo, Pecha Kucha as practice, presentation

Appendix 8. Designing assignments based on the SOLO Taxonomy

Assignment 1	• Learn about the existing theories and practices • Does not know how to apply the theories in practice	Prestructural and Unistructural
Assignment 2	• Practical elements introduced, watch videos, short films, social media, IMC • Brief provided- PR campaign plan (conditional)	Multistructural and Relational
Assignment 3	• Total freedom in thinking and application • Innovation	Extended Abstract

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