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Title: New working ideas in HE assessment and feedback

Project: "Re-engineering Assessment Practices"
Many resources: <http://www.reap.ac.uk/>

Abstract:

- A. Why we should worry about assessment & feedback practices
- B. Design principles for A&F
- C. Two particularly interesting cases
- D. You tell me whether / how this might apply to you

Defining the subject of "assessment and feedback"

Assessment: the narrow meaning is exam for external accreditation.

Feedback: the narrow sense is what a tutor writes about/on a finished piece of student work.

But students chat to their tutors during their work on a large assignment to get guidance.

Students discuss the (narrow) feedback they get with other students, and learn from that.

Students may look at published papers and learn more of what is required, the normal format, in that discipline.

In maths problems, computer programs, even giving a talk, the success or failure of the activity is more or less self-evident: the feedback comes from the task, not a person.

The real topic is all the "steers" i.e. formative guidance a learner gets that shape his or her learning for the better; and all the learning activities they do.

Why is A&F important?

Dropout / retention: a big factor is whether students, and separately the institution, feel they are successful at their subject.

The first year student experience: again, the student needs to be, and to feel, attuned to the subject and the staff's expectations of them.

The National Student Survey (and others) show how important A&F is to student (dis)satisfaction.

Assessment is a key driver of student performance

Assessment is a major cost in HE (in staff time and money).

It is widely reported that students often don't read the feedback so expensively written on their work.

Super-principle 1: "Steers" so doing leads to learning

1. Criteria: clarify what good performance is.
2. Self-assess: Facilitate:
 - a) Reflection
 - b) Self-assessment
3. Usable information from external experts: that enables students to self-correct.
4. Interactive dialogue about feedback and learning with:
 - a) Peers
 - b) Tutors
5. Self-esteem, self-efficacy: promote these through assessment.
- 5b) Attribution: so students believe they can change their performance
6. Opportunities to apply the lessons learned i.e. to repeat the task.
7. L→T. Yields information for modifying the teaching.

Super-principle 2: Time on task / effortI.e.: steers on how much work to do

- P2.1 Capture enough study time
- P2.2 Spread work (time) out evenly along the course timeline
- P2.3 Use the time productively for learning: deep not just shallow or busywork.
- P2.4 Communicate clear and high expectations.

Psychology case

Stage 1: Question 1: moderate difficulty (50 words)
Individual response – post it – discuss answer in groups (of 6)

Timed release: model answer to self-evaluate their response

E.g. Define and describe structural encoding, phonological encoding and semantic encoding. Provide an example of each construct.

Stage 2: Question 2: difficult (100 words)

Group response – discuss (online) – agree – post response

Model answer released for stage 2

E.g. Describe the serial position effect and its two separate components. Discuss the specific structural components of memory that are responsible.

Stage 3: Question 3: complex (300 word essay)

Group response – discuss (online) – agree – post

Model answer released for stage 3

E.g. Summarise the ‘stage theory’ of memory. To what extent does it provide an adequate theory of memory?

psy (3)

- Standard format and model answers provide progressive clarification of expectations (*clear goals, P1*)
 - Students encouraged to self-assess against model answer (*self-assessment, P2*)
 - Online peer discussion aimed at reaching consensus about response (*dialogue, P4*)
 - Staged complexity and focus on learning rather than marks (*motivation, P5*)
 - Repeated cycle of topics and tasks (*closing gap, P6*)
 - Tutors can monitor progress and adapt (*shaping teaching, P7*)
- Assessment tasks require significant study out of class (*capture sufficient study time, P2.1*)
- They are distributed across topics and weeks (*are spread out evenly, P2.2*)
- They move students progressively to deeper levels of understanding (*productive / deep learning, P2.3*)
- There are explicit goals and progressive increase in challenge (*communicates clear and high expectations, P2.4*)

Sci dept 1

Students introduced to MCQs – how they work

After lectures but before tutorial / problem solving class students in pairs prepare MCQ including feedback for right and wrong answers.

In tutorial, pairs swap MCQs and get feedback – revise - post in VLE.

Refinement: students identify which level of Bloom’s taxonomy their questions are testing

Final exam: teacher selects some students’ questions but has them provide reasons for answers.

Producing questions is compulsory.

Sci dept 2

Students develop questioning skills

Creating feedback develops writing skills and critical thinking – giving reasons for correct and wrong answers - deep learning

Sharing in class encourages peer feedback

Identifying Bloom's level leads to further reflection

Use in final exam encourages class to share work

Sci dept 3

Students create MCQs (*actively create criteria, P1*)

Evaluating content against criteria & Bloom categories (*self-assessment / reflection, P2*)

Tutor monitoring and general feedback (*P3*)

Peer feedback during creation and in tutorials (*dialogue, P4*)

MCQs used in exam and the creation process is engaging (*motivation, P5*)

Cyclical development of MCQs (*closing gap, P6*)

Teaching could be shaped by results (*P7*)

Writing MCQs as preparation for tutorials (*capture sufficient study time, P2.1*)

Task could be a regular requirement and built into tutorials (*are spread out evenly, P2.2*)

MCQs could move to deeper levels matching Bloom's taxonomy (*productive / deep learning, P2.3*)

The goals are clear and there is progressive increase in challenge (*communicates clear and high expectations, P2.4*)

Discussion

- Any immediate questions?

- Divide into pairs: would any of this apply to your situation? how?

- Plenary discussion:
 - How would you use these ideas in your case?
 - How would you improve the recipes described?
 - Why don't these ideas apply?
 - What would you do instead?