New thinking and practice in HE assessment and feedback

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Plan:
Introduction
Principles (towards theory)
Learning designs (2 cases of great practice)
Peer discussion: Your context

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Defining the scope of "assessment and feedback"

Students learn from doing: constructivists believe that, "activists" believe that.
=> The real issue is supporting doing for learning.

Assessment: the narrow meaning is a test for external accreditation.

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

But learners also learn and need help while attempting a task.
The feedback on failure is internal (getting stuck), but the vital external support is expert advice that unsticks them.

So the real topic is all the formative guidance a learner gets that shapes his or her doing, and so learning, for the better.

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 National Student Survey (and others) show how important A&F is to student (dis)satisfaction.
CEQ item "Teaching staff here normally give helpful feedback on how you are going" correlates the best with overall course satisfaction.

A&F is a key driver of student performance: a) for students driven by marks b) Black & Wiliam concluded that improving feedback is the action with the single biggest effect on learning outcomes.

A&F is a major cost in HE (in staff time and money).
BUT it is widely reported that students often don't read the feedback so expensively written on their work.

Super-principle 1: "Steers" so that doing leads to learning (Nicol)

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) staff
5. Self-esteem, self-efficacy: promote these through assessment.
6. Opportunities to apply the lessons learned I.e. to repeat the task.
7. L—>T feedback. Staff actions are contingent on (changed by) learner actions.

Super-principle 2: Time on task / effort (Gibbs & Simpson)
I.e. steers about 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 learning not just shallow or busywork.

P2.4 Communicate clear and high expectations.

Case 1: Psychology

Context:
- 560 first year students
- Mixture of psychology majors (130) and those taking psychology only for one year (430)
- 6 topic areas, 48 lectures, 4 tutorials, 12 practicals
- Assessment; 2 x MCQs (25%), tutorial attendance (4%), taking part in experiment (5%), essay exam (66%)

Psychology re-design

Stage 1: Question 1: moderate difficulty (50 words)
Individual response–post–discuss–agree--post Group response
1b:Timed release: Model answer to self-evaluate their response

Stage 2: Question 2: difficult (100 words)
Group response – discuss (online) – agree – post response
2b: Model answer released for stage 2

Stage 3: Question 3: complex (300 word essay)
Group response – discuss (online) – agree – post
3b: Model answer released for stage 3

Example of task set

- Task 1: Define and describe structural encoding, phonological encoding and semantic encoding. Provide an example of each construct. (50 words, individual)
- Task 2: Describe the serial position effect and its two separate components. Discuss the specific structural components of memory that are responsible. (100 word, group response)
- Task 3: Summarise the 'stage theory' of memory. To what extent does it provide an adequate theory of memory? (300 word, group response)

Big success, apparently!

- Students set targets beyond what was required:contradicts commonly held beliefs about assessment and external motivation (marks)
- Produced work at level 'not seen before' surpassing third year
- Spontaneous discussions about learning and learner responsibility
- Some students burdened by workload but easily detected
- Some groups participants moved at own request (3 groups)
- 13,429 messages posted by groups (postings from 40-400 per group)
- Quality of interactions 'outstanding' across the board
- Atmosphere in lecture class improved and online community

Case1 and the principles

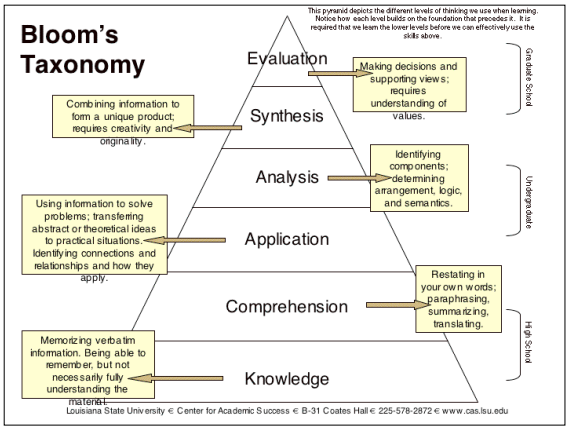
- Model answers and repeated task format provide progressive clarification of expectations (*clear criteria, P1*)
- Students encouraged to self-assess against model answer (*P2*)
- Online peer discussion aimed at reaching agreed response (*P4*)
- Staged complexity and focus on learning rather marks (*P5*)
- Repeated cycle of topics and tasks (*P6*)
- VLE captures all group interchanges, allowing course leader to monitor progress and adapt (*P7*)
- Tasks require significant study out of class (*capture enough work P2.1*)
- They are distributed across topics and weeks (*are spread out evenly P2.2*)
- They move students progressively to deeper levels of understanding (*P2.3*)
- There are explicit goals and progressive increase in challenge (*communicates clear and high expectations P2.4*)
- ? (P3) In fact, course leader does inject some expert responses (into VLE general discussion boards), though usually at meta-level.

Case 2: Science dept. MCQ L-design

- Students introduced to MCQs: how they work
- After lectures but before tutorial / problem 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.

MCQ L-design: features

- 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 levels leads to further reflection
- Use in final exam encourages class to share work; and validates the seriousness of the whole exercise



Case2 and the principles

- Students create MCQs (*clear criteria, P1*)
- Evaluating content against criteria & Bloom categories (*P2*)
- Tutor monitoring and general feedback (*P3*)
- Peer feedback during creation and in tutorials (*P4*)
- MCQs used in exam (self-efficacy *P5*)
- Cyclical development of MCQs (*P6*)
- Teaching could be shaped by results (*P7*)
- Writing MCQs as preparation for tutorial (*capture enough work P2.1*)
- Tasks could be a regular requirement (*are spread out evenly P2.2*)
- MCQs could move to deeper levels of Bloom's taxonomy (*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?