Putting Assessment for Learning into Practice

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Assessment for Learning

- Develops students' abilities to evaluate own progress, direct own learning
- Emphasises authentic & complex assessment tasks
- Is rich in informal feedback (e.g. peer review of draft writing, collaborative project work)
- Is rich in formal feedback (e.g. tutor comment, self-review logs)
- Uses high stakes summative assessment rigorously but sparingly
- Offers extensive 'low stakes' confidence building opportunities and practice
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Assessment activities relevant to the subject or profession involving appropriate skills, knowledge and integrated understanding – rather than isolated bits of knowledge, regurgitation of information or rehearsals of routine procedures.
An associated problem

“With essays all you have to do is go to the library, look up the relevant books, and just copy down the relevant chapters in a different language”

“You’re never going to need to know that kind of useless information”
One approach - Virtual Gallery
Students’ views

“It wasn’t just a written assignment so it seemed more interesting”
“I am willing to work at it because I know it is going to be useful”
“It was your own thoughts about something specific that you chose to do and because I liked this web site so much it was ‘Yes! I’m going to do that!’ “
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Summative assessment is needed for a variety of purposes but should not be allowed to drive the whole teaching and learning process.
An associated problem

“Students will only do it if it’s got marks attached!”
One approach

• A series of practically-based tasks
  – Engineering workshop skills
  – Communication skills
• Discussion and review in class
• Students logs
• Summative assessment by 10 minute oral exam
Lecturer views

“It’s a cost-effective use of our time – as long as we get organised!”
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Offers extensive ‘low stakes’ confidence building opportunities and practice and is rich in informal feedback.
Associated problems

“If you're sitting trying to take notes in a lecture it's a big rush. If you get a handout and the lecturer basically reads it out you don't learn anything from that: it doesn't go in”

“It's annoying really with exams and things like that because you never really know [how you are doing]. I mean, it's like the assignments [for another unit]: we only just got them back on Thursday. You don't know what was good and what wasn't… “
One approach: student-created posters
Building theoretical ‘layers’ based on directed reading
Student’s views

“You do wonder, in your own mind, if you’re getting the right idea, but I think it’s loads better to have a go before it really counts. If we hadn’t done these (tasks) I would have felt really scared about handing in … work at the end of the semester. I would just panic, feeling lost. With this way, I’m not saying I can do it, but I feel like I know I'm going in the right direction, I know what I should be trying to do. And I know that my ideas are not completely stupid! “
Informal feedback from peers

“‘Cause really when you're going around looking at other posters you're collaborating what you've done with other people to make sure that you've got the point. This is you re-affirming again.”

“And you were checking that you were getting little bits, because, I mean, constant checking and re-affirming that seems to be happening in this lecture …which is why I feel much more comfortable “
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Formal feedback can be associated with assessed work at the summative or formative (e.g. draft) stages or with in-class activities.
An associated problem

“When we got to over 100 students in the year group we couldn’t cope with the marking let alone give feedback”

“First year students are anxious about how they’re getting on”
One approach

Psychology practicals

- Students write up parts of practical reports
- Marking with feedback within 2 days
- Whole class feedback
- Follow up on non-submission or low scores
Staff views

“Our students do pretty well now at report writing!”

“The investment of resources is worth it – even though we now have nearly 200 students!”
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For graduates and professionals the most important assessment is self-assessment. Our students should be helped to develop appropriate dispositions, attitudes and skills.
An associated problem

“I only know what I would put in an essay, or what I think should go in”
One approach: involving students with assessment criteria

• Formulating criteria exercise (Race, Brown & Smith, 2002) on ‘Assessment for Learning’ option module.
  – Study guide and reflective commentary

• Students generate own criteria
  – But it became apparent they were focusing exclusively on the guide
Guide

Informative
Fun
Coherent
Useful
Visual
Eye catching

Gets message across
Easy to follow - Synopsis
Links to practice
Suitable for audience
Reflective Commentary

Explains Reasoning
Demonstrates Understanding
Well Referenced
Links explicitly to Guide
Reflects on Process/Underpinning Philosophy
Links to Practice

Creativity/Fun
Assessment Criteria

Understands AFL concepts

Interpret Findings in relation to AFL

Illustrates rationale behind Guide
  - why I've designed it the way I have

Puts theory into practice
  - sense of purpose
  - does what it says it does

Show creativity
  - puts message across
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AfL in your context

Identify in your pairs:

• Challenges or barriers to using AfL
CETL AfL

http://northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_afl/