Assessment & Feedback, Wellbeing & Resilience

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Assessment is a vitally important influence on student learning

Assessment influences both:

- Cognitive aspects - *what and how*
- Operant aspects - *when and how much*

(Cohen-Schotanus, 1999)

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Importance of course design & assessment

*"**Students** can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they **cannot** (by definition if they want to graduate) **escape the effects of poor assessment**. Assessment acts as a mechanism to control students that is far more pervasive and insidious than most staff would be prepared to acknowledge. It appears to conceal the deficiencies of teaching as much as it does to promote learning. If, as teachers, we want to exert maximum leverage over change in higher education **we must confront the ways in which assessment tends to undermine learning**."* (Boud, 1995, p35)

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Problems with current practice

1. Failure to ensure the assessment of the espoused programme outcomes.
2. Atomisation of assessment: focused, at the micro-level, on what is easy to assess; failure to integrate and assess complex, higher-order learning; the sum of parts not making the intended whole.
3. Students and staff failing to see the links/coherence of the programme.

From the PASS Project Position Paper – http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk/position-paper.pdf

Problems with current practice

4. Modules are too short to focus and provide feedback on slowly learnt literacies and/or complex learning.
5. Students and staff adopting a 'tick-box' mentality, focused on marks, engendering a surface approach to learning which can 'encourage' plagiarism and 'game-playing'.
6. Too much summative assessment, leading to overworked staff, not enough formative assessment and inability to 'see the wood for the trees' in the accumulated results.

From the PASS Project Position Paper – http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk/position-paper.pdf

Solutions

Less but better summative assessment

- *explicitly linked to Learning Outcomes, especially programme LOs*, and integrated learning (programme focussed assessment)

More formative assessment, &

Develop students' assessment literacy

Programme focussed assessment

assessment should be "***specifically designed to address major programme outcomes*** *rather than very specific or isolated components of the course. It follows then that such assessment* ***is integrative in nature****, trying to bring together understanding and skills in ways which represent key programme aims* [**valid**]*. As a result, the assessment is likely to be more* ***authentic and meaningful*** [**relevant**] *to students, staff and external stakeholders.*"

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Course design & theory of constructive alignment

3-stage design process:

- What are “desired” outcomes?
- What teaching methods require students to behave in ways that are likely to achieve those outcomes?
- What assessment tasks will tell us if the actual outcomes match those that are intended or desired?

This is the essence of ‘constructive alignment’

(Biggs, 1999)

Constructive alignment of the programme

"Curriculum sequencing":

- Develop a collective philosophy
- Communicate sequencing to students & staff

  NSS – "The single best predictor of 'Overall Satisfaction' was *"The course was well designed and running smoothly""*

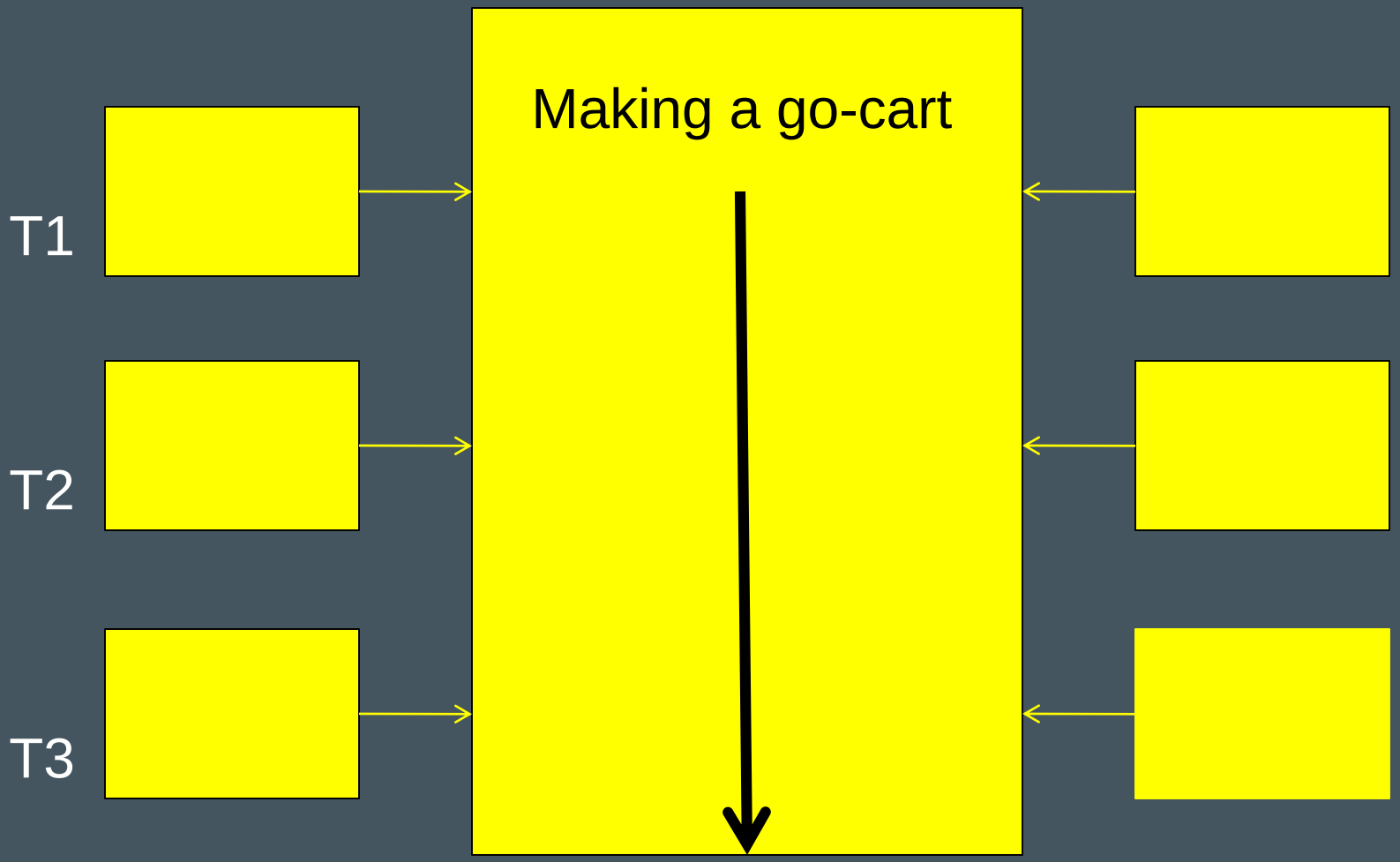
  (Langan et al, 2013; & Burgess et al, (2018)]
- Develop strong building blocks

  [e.g. Cornerstones and capstones;

  Maastricht; & Automotive engineering models]

(O'Neill, Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2014)

1st Year Automotive Engineering



Task

In pairs, consider where and how you currently assess the programme outcomes, and integrated learning.

Could you do it better, and if so, how?

Programme design, Wellbeing & Resilience

Positively reinforce/allow for early failure 1

Low self-belief can adversely affect achievement, and lead to drop-out:

- Believe failure due to lack of intelligence
- Leads to ‘learned helplessness’
- Difficult tasks prompt giving up
- Overly concerned with ‘saving face’

Mantz Yorke, based on study of six institutions.
ILT symposium on widening participation and
Promoting student retention, 27th September, 2001

Programme design, Wellbeing & Resilience

Positively reinforce/allow for early failure 2

Possible assessment solutions:

- Adjust the curriculum to foster development (in particular assessment literacy)
- Set sub-goals for longer assignments
- Allow for ‘slow learning’ in the programme’s assessment strategy
- Make first semester assessments primarily formative

Mantz Yorke, based on study of six institutions.
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Empowering students through a completely integrated programme design

Reforming the academy …… Davidson recognizes, requires **empowering students, helping them learn how to learn**, and departing from the past century's obsession with specialization and standardized measurements of outputs. The transition must be toward **assessing authentic student work on scaffolded assignments spanning a student's first to final semester** and connecting the curricular and co-curricular.

Doing so, she maintains, will necessitate abandoning a deficit model that emphasizes what students are missing and **embracing an asset-based approach that leverages students' strengths by fostering active, project-based learning.**

Cathy N. Davidson, founding director of the Futures Initiative at the Graduate Center, City University of New York

in *The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World in Flux* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), p73

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Linked but distinctive key aspects of effective assessment tasks

- Valid – truly assess what they claim to assess
- Authentic – a ‘real’ world task, even better in a ‘real’ world setting (placements, live projects, etc.)
- Relevant – something which the student is personally interested in, and wants to know more about or be able to do

Both authenticity and relevance should make the activity meaningful to the student, and therefore be motivating (the antithesis of an ‘academic exercise’!)

More formative assessment

- course design should explicitly include identifying formative assessment events/feedback loops
- feedback as effect not input (no effect no feedback!)
- remember effective feedback mantra – to be effective need 'motive, opportunity, means' (Shute, 2008)
- strategically focus high-value feedback (resources) at key points in the programme where students are particularly challenged ('troublesome knowledge', epistemological jumps and/or points where there are changes in the level of support and autonomy)
- Mechanise/'quick & dirty' feedback where appropriate (e.g. generic feedback, on-line tests, etc.)

Students must be brought into the community of assessment practice

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- To improve student learning necessary that "*the student comes to hold a concept of quality roughly similar to that held by the teacher*" (Sadler, 1989)
- Passive receipt of feedback has little effect on future performance

  (Fritz et al, 2000) Dialogue and participatory relationships are key elements of engaging students with assessment feedback (ESwAF FDTL, 2007)
- It is not enough to make it a better monologue; feedback must be seen as a dialogue (Nicol, 2009)
- "*participation, as a way of learning, enables the student to both absorb, and be absorbed in the culture of practice*" (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002, p. 246)
- The most significant factor in student academic success is student involvement fostered by student/staff interactions and student/student interactions (Astin, 1997)

  so – marking exercises, self-assessment, peer assessment
- The only common factor in study of departments deemed excellent in both research & learning & teaching is high levels of student involvement (Gibbs, 2007)

Assessment literacy

For students to reach their potential and be confident in terms of their assessed performance they need to become assessment literate

Assessment literacy encompasses:

- an appreciation of assessment's relationship to learning;
- a conceptual understanding of assessment (i.e. understanding of the basic principles of valid assessment and feedback practice, including the terminology used);
- understanding of the nature, meaning and level of assessment criteria and standards;
- skills in self- and peer assessment;
- familiarity with technical approaches to assessment (i.e. familiarity with pertinent assessment and feedback skills, techniques, and methods, including their purpose and efficacy); and
- possession of the intellectual ability to select and apply appropriate approaches and techniques to assessed tasks (not only does one have the requisite skills, but one is also able to judge which skill to use when, for which task).

(Price et al, 2012 pp10-11)

Students' feedback literacy - 4 inter-related features

Appreciating feedback

- understand & appreciate role of feedback in improving work & the active learner role in these processes;
- recognise feedback information comes in different forms & different sources;
- use technology to access, store & revisit feedback.

Making judgements

- develop capacities to make sound academic judgments about their own work and the work of others;
- participate productively in peer feedback processes;
- refine self-evaluative capacities over time, to make more robust judgments.

Managing affect

- maintain emotional equilibrium & avoid defensiveness when receiving critical feedback;
- Proactive eliciting suggestions & continuing dialogue with peers or teachers as needed;
- develop habits of striving for continuous improvement on the basis of internal & external
- feedback.

Leading to …..Taking action

- are aware of the imperative to take action in response to feedback information;
- draw inferences from a range of feedback experiences for continuous improvement;
- develop a repertoire of strategies for acting on feedback.

(Carless & Boud, 2018)

Key aspect to developing students' assessment literacy

Self and peer assessment need to be seen as essential graduate attributes
(i.e. learning outcomes themselves, rather than processes)

Feedback needs to be seen as a dialogue (rather than a monologue)

… with an explicit intention to bring students into the community of assessment practice