Assessment and its types

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Abstract:*This paper explores assessment and learning in a way that blurs their boundaries. The notion of assessment as learning (AaL) is offered as an aspect of formative assessment (assessment for learning). It considers how pupils self-regulate their own learning, and in so doing make complex decisions about how they use feedback and engage with the learning priorities of the classroom. Discussion is framed from a sociocultural stance, yet challenges some of the perspectives that have widely become accepted. It offers three new views to help explore the concept of AaL: understanding feedback; understanding the learning gap; and exploring vocabularies of assessment. Pragmatically, the ideas examined suggest that teachers may need to consider less about focused and directive feedback, but more about how learners interpret and understand feedback from their self-regulatory and self-productive identities and how vocabularies for assessment can be more collaboratively shared in learning contexts.*

Keywords *:Learning and teaching Assessment, Deep and surface approaches. Student assessment, affective variables.*

Intorduction

Assessment is a continuous process, the primary purpose of which is to improve student learning (Gronlund, 2006). It is acknowledged that assessment has a profound influence on what and how much students learn and how effectively they learn, and the quality of assessment is an essential feature of successful teaching (Jimaa, 2011). According to Wiliam and Black (1996), assessment can be viewed as a cycle of three phases: eliciting evidence,

interpreting evidence and taking actions.

Student assessment is, arguably, the centerpiece of the teaching and learning process and therefore the subject of much discussion in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Without some method of obtaining and analyzing evidence of student learning, we can never know whether our teaching is making a difference. That is, teaching requires some process through which we can come to know whether students are developing the desired knowledge and skills, and therefore whether our instruction is effective. Learning assessment is like a magnifying glass we hold up to students' learning to discern whether the teaching and learning process is functioning well or is in need of change.

To provide an overview of learning assessment, this teaching guide has several goals, 1) to define student learning assessment and why it is important, 2) to discuss several approaches that may help to guide and refine student assessment, 3) to address various methods of student assessment, including the test and the essay, and 4) to offer several resources for further research. In addition, you may find helfpul this five-part video series on assessment that was part of the Center for Teaching's Online Course Design Institute.

The scholarship of teaching and learning discusses two general forms of assessment.

The first, **summative assessment**, is one that is implemented at the end of the course of study, for example via comprehensive final exams or papers. Its primary purpose is to produce an evaluation that "sums up" student learning. Summative assessment is comprehensive in nature and is fundamentally concerned with learning outcomes. While summative assessment is often useful for communicating final evaluations of student achievement, it does so without providing opportunities for students to reflect on their progress, alter their learning, and demonstrate growth or improvement; nor does it allow instructors to modify their teaching strategies before student learning in a course has concluded (Maki, 2002).

The second form, **formative assessment**, involves the evaluation of student

learning at intermediate points before any summative form. Its fundamental purpose is to help students during the learning process by enabling them to reflect on their challenges and growth so they may improve. By analyzing students' performance through formative assessment and sharing the results with them, instructors help students to "understand their strengths and weaknesses and to reflect on how they need to improve over the course of their remaining studies" (Maki, 2002, p. 11). Pat Hutchings refers to as "assessment behind outcomes": "the promise of assessment—mandated or otherwise—is improved student learning, and improvement requires attention not only to final results but also to how results occur. Assessment behind outcomes means looking more carefully at the process and conditions that lead to the learning we care about…" (Hutchings, 1992, p. 6, original emphasis). Formative assessment includes all manner of coursework with feedback, discussions between instructors and students, and end-of-unit examinations that provide an opportunity for students to identify important areas for necessary growth and development for themselves (Brown and Knight, 1994).

Assessment of student learning plays a crucial role in higher education and undergraduate research is no different. We define assessment as the act of evaluating student performance as related to a particular task (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). This broad definition includes the many ways judgements and evaluations of student learning and performance are made within the diverse range of learning experiences (Tai et al., 2023). For undergraduates, assessment drives what is learnt and how and when the learning takes place (Taras, 2005). It forces students to make decisions, set learning goals, and formulate plans. Assessment directs student learning, and this applies to learning in undergraduate research.

Traditionally, two main purposes of assessment and their associated models have been articulated. Namely, the promotion of student learning (Houston & Thompson, 2017) through feedback processes and the certification of student learning (Lam, 2015; Tai et al.2023). To these has more recently been added the assessment for the promotion of student judgements of their own learning (Boud,

2000). However, how these areas play out across undergraduate research is less clear.

Limited research available presents staff or student self-report measures of engaging within research. The focus is often on evaluating the effectiveness or outcomes of undergraduate research programmes and initiatives, less on assessing learning outcomes and outputs of individual student undergraduate research experiences (Auchincloss et al.2014; Wilson et al., 2016a). Isolated examples of literature investigate specific types of assessment used to assess the learning and outcomes in undergraduate research. For example, according to Auchincloss et al. (2014), commonly used types of assessment include student publication, poster presentations, and more recently student reflections on learning. More recent publications highlight the benefit and use of ongoing and guided reflection to assess student development in undergraduate research, such as journaling (Mimbs, 2017) and keeping a reflective diary (Wilson et al., 2016). Some studies have researched the assessment of learning via undergraduate dissertations (see Annetts et al., 2013; Webster et al., 2000).

Barbara Walvoord (2010) argues that assessment is more likely to be successful if there is a clear plan, whether one is assessing learning in a course or in an entire curriculum (see also Gelmon, Holland, and Spring, 2018). Without some intentional and careful plan, assessment can fall prey to unclear goals, vague criteria, limited communication of criteria or feedback, invalid or unreliable assessments, unfairness in student evaluations, or insufficient or even unmeasured learning. There are several steps in this planning process.

Defining learning goals. An assessment plan usually begins with a clearly articulated set of learning goals.

Defining assessment methods. Once goals are clear, an instructor must decide on what evidence – assignment(s) – will best reveal whether students are meeting the goals. We discuss several common methods below, but these need not be limited by anything but the learning goals and the teaching context. **Developing the assessment**. The next step would be to formulate clear formats, prompts, and

performance criteria that ensure students can prepare effectively and provide valid, reliable evidence of their learning.

Integrating assessment with other course elements. Then the remainder of the course design process can be completed. In both integrated (Fink 2013) and backward course design models (Wiggins & McTighe 2005), the primary assessment methods, once chosen, become the basis for other smaller reading and skill-building assignments as well as daily learning experiences such as lectures, discussions, and other activities that will prepare students for their best effort in the assessments.

Communicate about the assessment. Once the course has begun, it is possible and necessary to communicate the assignment and its performance criteria to students. This communication may take many and preferably multiple forms to ensure student clarity and preparation, including assignment overviews in the syllabus, handouts with prompts and assessment criteria, rubrics with learning goals, model assignments (e.g., papers), in-class discussions, and collaborative decision-making about prompts or criteria, among others.

Administer the assessment. Instructors then can implement the assessment at the appropriate time, collecting evidence of student learning – e.g., receiving papers or administering tests

Analyze the results. Analysis of the results can take various forms – from reading essays to computer-assisted test scoring – but always involves comparing student work to the performance criteria and the relevant scholarly research from the field(s).

Communicate the results. Instructors then compose an assessment complete with areas of strength and improvement, and communicate it to students along with grades (if the assignment is graded), hopefully within a reasonable time frame. This also is the time to determine whether the assessment was valid and reliable, and if not, how to communicate this to students and adjust feedback and grades fairly. For instance, were the test or essay questions confusing, yielding invalid and unreliable assessments of student knowledge.

Reflect and revise. Once the assessment is complete, instructors and students can develop learning plans for the remainder of the course so as to ensure improvements, and the assignment may be changed for future courses, as necessary.

Conclusion

This study aimed to scope existing and exemplary assessment practices used with undergraduate research in Australasian universities. Survey data showed that undergraduate research is currently assessed at multiple time-points throughout degree programmes using a variety of mechanisms. These mechanisms reflect conventional assessment procedures familiar from non-research coursework or borrow from postgraduate research practice that do not adequately support nor make visible the learning and development of the undergraduate research student. The undergraduate research convenors interviewed for this study, revealed a significant amount of energy and good will invested to realise the learning outcomes of undergraduate research though provision of ongoing formative feedback and supporting the learning process more than focusing on research output. By doing so, they constantly negotiate between institutional expectations, and the needs of undergraduate research and their students. The study implications call for a rethink to implement more fit-for-purpose assessment mechanisms for undergraduate research and present key principles to provide guidance.

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