Co-constructing assessment criteria: imposing a ‘learner-centred’ pedagogy?

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Context

BA Education Studies, 3rd year, 20 credit module

Assessment in Education

• theory/classroom practice interface
• emphasis on Assessment for Learning (AfL)
• students evaluate assessment practice
Plan

Present students with an opportunity to co-construct the assessment criteria for the module
• using existing thresholds (0-29%, 30-39%, etc.)
• drawing on familiar language of assessment criteria (sound range, make excellent use of, etc.)
Rationale

Co-constructed assessment criteria

- “Internalised if (pupils) have had a stake in their generation… more effective than those simply given” (Clarke, 2014, pp. 87-95)
- Shared understanding of criteria & learner capacity for self-assessment (ARG, 2002)
- Learners as ‘partners in learning’ represents element of effective practice (Alexander, 2004)
- Use of HE student-centred pedagogies increases engagement (Evans et al., 2015)
- “Manipulate environments in ways that help learners make sense of the knowledge available to them” (Edwards, 2001, p. 163).
- Opportunities to engage with ‘good practice’ in context of students’ own learning/outcomes/attainment… *de facto* module content

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What happened

• Some students preferred pre-constructed criteria: *Can’t you just write the criteria for us?*

• I intervened, pushing students’ criteria beyond simple repetition of existing generic descriptors (“sound…good…excellent”) applied to expectations

• Learning outcome terminology required explanation/ exemplification (e.g. values, issues, debates, key concepts)

• Co-construction resulted in highly detailed criteria representing a tick-list of how to succeed
What had gone wrong?

My ‘student-centred approach’ was imposed, with little room for student autonomy

Led to technical assessment model: *How to pass this assignment* tick-list

Assessment as learning rather than Assessment for Learning – increased level of dependence on tutors? (Torrance, 2007)

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Characteristic of my whole approach?

*Instrumentalism*: “linear input-output procedure” devoid of the “elementary features of the real learning and teaching process” (Ransome, 2011, p.217).

*Reproductive learning*: learning as “dominative, reproducing oppressive and exploitative relationships and ideologies” (Foley, 1994, p. 127).
However…

Outcomes were improved
• Average mark 58.6%.
• Average mark for BAME students was 59%.
• Average mark cohort at Level 5 was 53.9%.

Quality of teacher based on TEF-type metrics was strong:
• Evaluative statements are all framed positively: for example, *I found the teaching on the module engaging* and *I have a good understanding of the learning outcomes for the module*
• 100% of 28 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with four of the ten statements; 96% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with a further four statements.

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Moving on

Challenging the assumptions around the needs of cohorts of students

• The methods may have been successful, but these were based on unsubstantiated stereotypes

Mechanisms for increasing student autonomy within the tightly structured parameters of Q&A and TEF expectations:

• Students design the assessment task to address the module outcomes and assessment criteria?
References


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