Aligning Rubrics: Improving the Relevance and Quality of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that explicitly aligning scoring rubrics with assessment criteria for tertiary learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and application), that are aligned with graduate outcome demands of industry and other employers, will improve the social relevance, quality, transparency and transferability of qualifications.

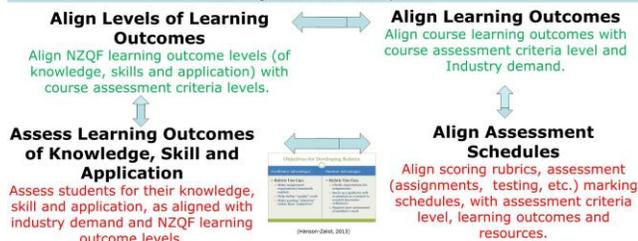## Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.3.1 [**Computers in Education**]

Keywords

Rubrics, Qualification levels, Graduate and Learning outcomes, Learning resources. Assessment criteria

1. INTRODUCTION

Too many Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary graduates continue to be unemployable in the disciplines they qualify in. According to International watchdogs, the quality of New Zealand tertiary education continues to decline, and while the NZQA policy (in non-university tertiary institutions) has started to focus on graduate outcomes, that policy has not yet translated well into education provider practice [7].

To be socially relevant, qualification learning outcomes (knowledge, skill and application), in universities as well as non-university institutions, should be better aligned with those demanded by industry and other employers. To foster relevant, fair and accurate assessment standards, scoring rubrics should align explicit assessment grading criteria with an appropriate level of qualification standard, learning outcomes and resources - that can be a better basis for effective teaching and learning, self-evaluation, reflection, and peer review.

2. HIGHER EDUCATION ISSUES

There are three distinct stages in the development and delivery of tertiary programmes and courses in New Zealand - design and development, approval and accreditation, delivery [3].

The issue of poor academic standards has been the elephant in the room for a number of years in universities, especially in business faculties. Many international students struggle to meet the academic standards and expectations of overseas universities [5], as indeed do many domestic students.

It has been concluded that rubrics seem to have the potential of promoting learning and/or improve instruction. The main reason for this potential lies in the fact that rubrics make expectations and criteria explicit, which also facilitates feedback and self-assessment. It is thus argued that assessment quality criteria should emphasize dimensions like transparency and fitness for self-assessment to a greater extent than is done through the traditional reliability and validity criteria [2].

As many economies acknowledge the necessity for increasingly skilled workforces, the compatibility of learning levels and the transferability of credits between qualifications are becoming an increasingly important focus to facilitate lifelong learning [8].

While evaluative rubrics look beguilingly simple they are hard to do well. However, when done well, evaluative rubrics can substantially increase the use and credibility of evaluation. [4]

"The mismatch between job requirements and the qualifications of graduates is a growing concern globally" [6].

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The current distinct three staged process of tertiary course development [3] needs to be reviewed and improved to better effect policy translation into practice, and both the policy and practice need to be optimized to rationalize and align rubrics for improved tertiary qualification relevance and quality in New Zealand.

Aligning scoring rubrics with other rubrics and learning resources that encapsulate the demand for socially relevant learning outcomes, that are compatible and transferable to support the demand for an increasingly lifelong skilled workforce [8] should be put into practice, sooner rather than later.

That means aligning scoring rubrics with explicit assessment grading criteria that are aligned with an appropriate level of qualification standard, learning outcomes and resources, that are aligned with employer graduate outcome demand.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Aotearoa tertiary qualification learning outcomes can be more socially relevant to satisfy employer demand in New Zealand and abroad, be of better quality, transparent and transferable, by using scoring rubrics aligned with other rubrics and learning resources that encapsulate the demand for social relevance and quality of learning outcomes.

Future research and effort should be put into evaluating the most effective rubric practices and integrating/modelling them into Aotearoa tertiary rubric practices for improved learning outcomes.

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