Assessment Rubrics in NZ Tertiary Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes pilot study research into assessment rubrics used in NZ tertiary education programmes, to evaluate the quality of tertiary assessment for its alignment with social and industry relevance, transparency and transferability of NZ tertiary qualifications.

Keywords: Rubrics, Tertiary, Programme purpose, Graduate and learning outcomes, Employable skills, Assessment criteria.

1. INTRODUCTION

NZ tertiary assessment management continues to delegate to a summative black box, while the revolution of using assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning, and not primarily as a summation of teaching and learning, has swept through many primary and secondary schools in New Zealand and overseas, and tertiary education overseas. (Hattie, 2009).

Assessment rubrics can play a powerful role in assessment for learning. Provided to students early on in a course, they can be an effective tool for teaching and learning, for enabling peer assessment, integrating formative and summative assessment.

This paper reviews assessment principles, rubric principles and usage in literature and proposes a pilot study to fill the knowledge gap about assessment rubrics in NZ tertiary.

2. ASSESSMENT AS FEEDBACK INFORMATION

Ideally, to promote learning, assessment should primarily be concerned with providing teachers and/or students' feedback

information about their performance, which they then need to interpret when answering the three feedback questions:

- Where am I going? (What am I aiming to understand)
- How am I going? (what do I understand)
- Where to next?

This feedback reduces the learning gap between what is aimed to be understood and what is understood. (Hattie, 2003)

3. FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Formative assessment refers to the frequent, interactive assessment of student progress to identify learning needs and shape teaching (OECD, 2005). Black and William's 1998 review of rigorous quantitative studies established that formative assessment methods and techniques produce significant learning gains – according to their analysis, among the largest ever identified for educational interventions.

Moreover, a few studies have shown the largest gains for students who had previously been classified as low achievers.
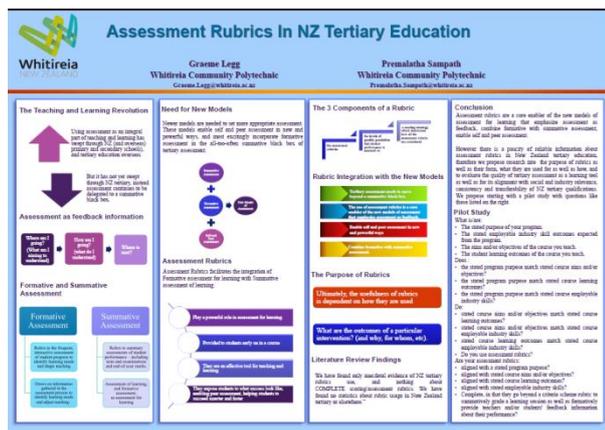
Summative assessment refers to summary assessments of student performance – including tests and examinations and end-of-year marks.

Summative assessments of individual students may be used for promotion, certification or admission to higher levels of education.

Formative assessment, by contrast, draws on information gathered in the assessment process to identify learning needs and adjust teaching.

Summative assessment is sometimes referred to as assessment of learning, and formative assessment, as assessment for learning. (Looney, 2011)

Newer models are needed to set more appropriate assessment. These models enable self and peer assessment in new and powerful ways, and most excitingly incorporate formative assessment in the all-too-often summative black box of tertiary assessment.

4. ASSESSMENT RUBRICS AND THE NEED FOR RESEARCH

Assessment Rubrics facilitate the integration of Formative assessment for learning with Summative assessment of learning.
Rubrics include 3 core components - assessment criteria, performance gradation and scoring.

They expose students up front to what success looks like, thus improving the likelihood of engaging both students and teachers on where students need to go to, and helping them to get there faster and smarter, enabling self and peer assessment.

When students know the learning intentions of each class and each assessment, and also know what success looks like, then learning is greatly improved. The use of scoring rubrics, worked examples, mastery learning, reciprocal teaching, and model answers provided to the student PRIOR to submission of work makes a major difference to the students" learning; if these things do not occur, students must best guess what you want! Why not tell them the levels and degrees of what success looks like and see if they can attain this? (Hattie, 2009)

Also, it is important that while "Ultimately, the usefulness of rubrics is dependent on how they are used." (Beng, 2012), it is just as important what they are used for. "What are the outcomes of a particular intervention? (and why, for whom, etc)." Davidson et al (2011).

We have found only anecdotal evidence of NZ assessment rubrics in literature, no statistics about complete assessment rubric usage in New Zealand or elsewhere.

We have found no evidence (even anecdotal) of complete assessment rubrics, complete in that they are aligned with programme purpose, course delivery, aims, learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and application), and the demands of tertiary graduate employers, complete in that they include scoring of a specific assessment and provide teachers and/or students' with specific feedback information about specific learning session performance.

We have found in literature Rubrics like that shown below which are assessment guideline rubrics, rather than complete scoring assessment rubrics.

Beyond Assessment: Assuring Student Learning in Higher Education
Victoria J. Mabin and Stephen J. Marshall, Victoria University of Wellington
(2011)

Trait	Exemplary	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Question assumptions	Identifies key assumptions of situation and disciplinary tools and discusses them in thorough and/or insightful fashion, validating, challenging, and/or revising as appropriate.	Key assumptions of disciplinary tools and situation are identified and clearly stated.	Assumptions are not identified, only tangentially discussed or implied rather than stated.
Draw conclusions	Draws thorough, appropriate conclusions demonstrating an ability to identify priority, significance and impact. Makes ethical judgements where appropriate	Draw appropriate, justifiable conclusions addressing major outcomes.	Conclusions do not follow from evidence and analysis, are far-fetched or trivial in scope.
Reflect	Comments in a structured and insightful way on: • Outcomes • Process • The initial situation • The disciplinary tools used • Their learning experience.	Makes a substantive reflective statement addressing at least one of: • Outcomes • Process • The initial situation • The disciplinary tools used • Their learning experience.	No attempt at reflection, or only superficial comments apparent.

Figure 4: Sample Rubric
BCA Learning Objective LO1c: Reflect critically on practical and theoretical issues

5. CONCLUSIONS

Tertiary assessment needs to move beyond a summative black box.

We conclude that the use of assessment rubrics is a core enabler of the new models of assessment that emphasize assessment as feedback, enable self and peer assessment in new and powerful ways, and most excitingly combine formative with summative assessment.

However there is a paucity of reliable information about assessment rubrics in New Zealand tertiary education, therefore we propose a pilot study to start filling in that knowledge gap, a pilot study with questions that look like those listed in this paper's poster.

This research needs to address the purpose of rubrics as well as their form, what they are used for as well as how, and to evaluate the quality of tertiary assessment as a learning tool as well as for its alignment with social and industry relevance, consistency and transferability of NZ tertiary qualifications.

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