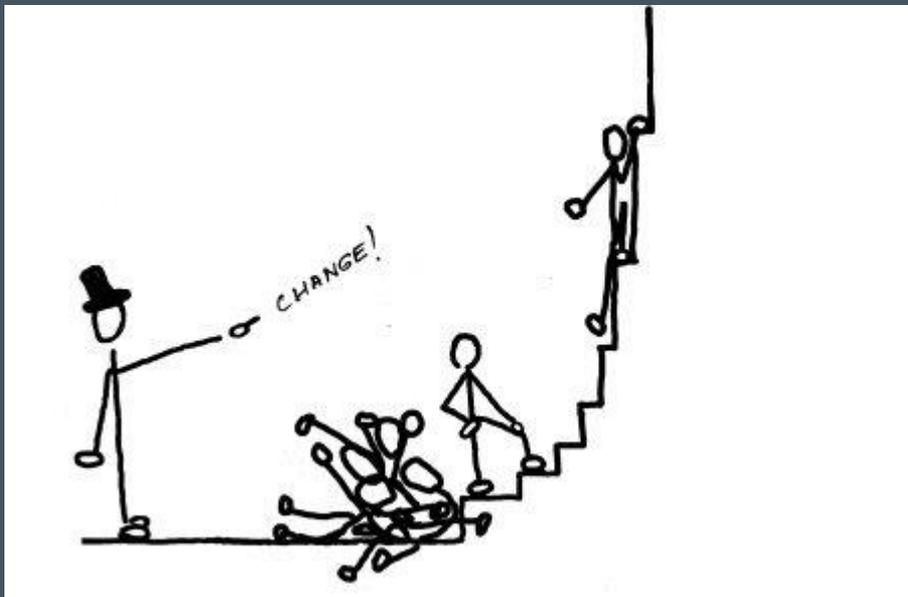


# Assessment literacy: making the link between satisfaction and learning



Prof. Margaret Price

Director,  
ASKe Pedagogy Research Centre  
Faculty of Business



<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske>

# The position we find ourselves in

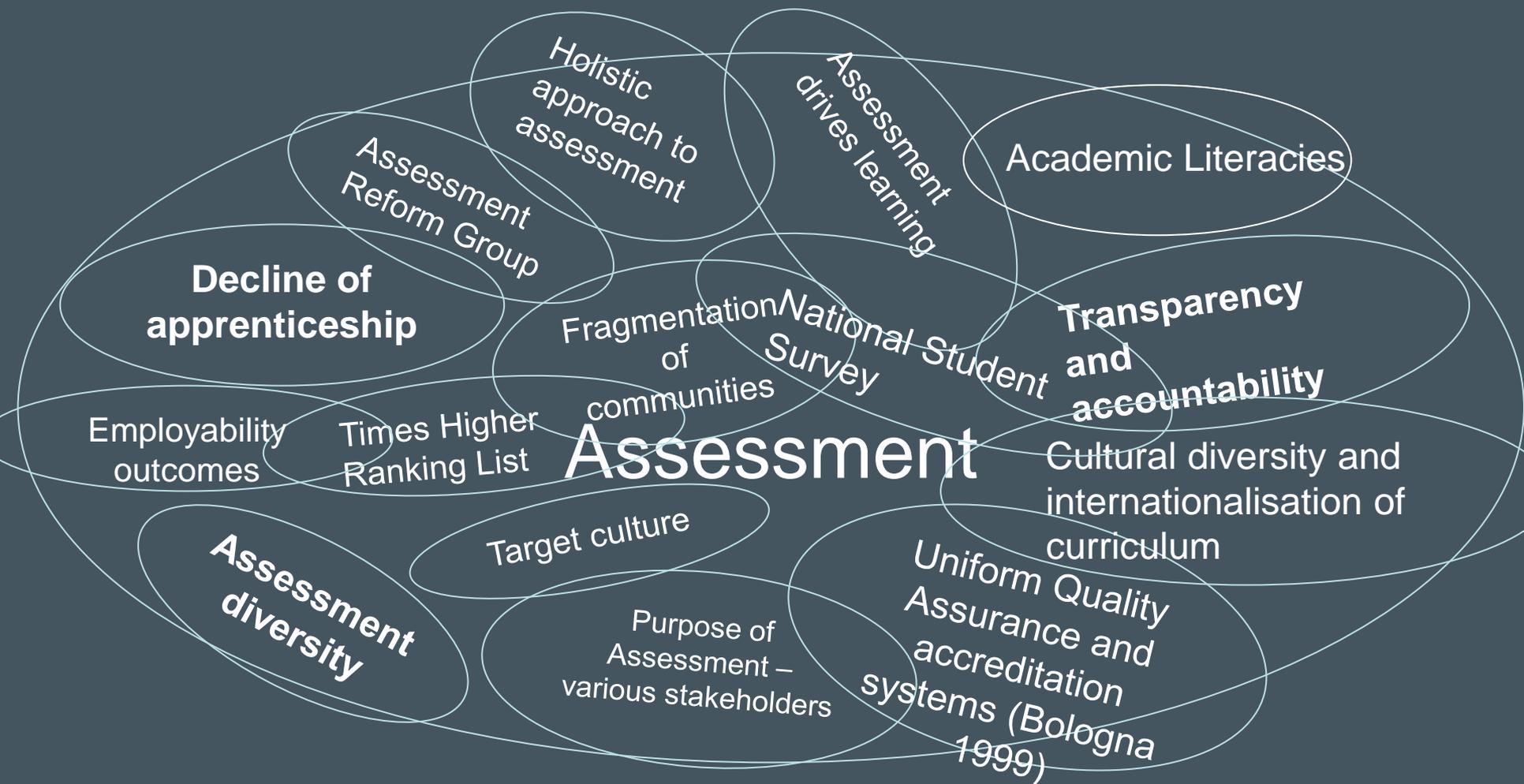
- Impact of satisfaction surveys, league tables etc.
- Students largely in a passive role EXCEPT as evaluators
- Are students equipped to be effective evaluators?
- Is staff understanding of assessment and feedback good enough to support development of evaluative skills about the process of learning?

Advocating recognition and facilitation of assessment literacy.

# Assessment literacy

Oh no,  
not another literacy

# Assessment Context



# Current assessment climate

More traditional forms of assessment tend to be taken for granted (Pryor and Croussard 2007)

Assessment is being slow to catch up with pedagogic developments

Impact on assessment cultures. Teachers and students develop implicit and explicit expectations about learning and assessment (Ecclestone, 2006)

# Assessment Literacy – an essential new domain?

Bring a complete **draft** of your assignment to the **peer** review sessions

1500 word **Research Project** - Contemporary Issues and World Politics

Assignment – Business

Write a **short essay** on the topic given below

Task 2 requires you to prepare a **spreadsheet**

This is a **team project** where you work as a group. Your team is required to **construct a website**

Working in pairs, submit the following documentation:

- A **Powerpoint handout** (3 slides per page) suitable for presenting at a senior management meeting
- An A4 one page **Management Summary** of the key findings

Hospitality

Working in small groups, you are expected to produce a **photographic account** of a food and/or drink related social event.

Write and submit a full “**publishable**” **academic article** in a topic of your interest

Requirements for how to write **(20%)** **précis**

Each **précis** should be no longer than 600 words.

Produce a **critical appraisal** to evaluate the evidence you have found

**Review of Learning (20%)**

Construct a **reflective evaluation** of your own learning

**Essay Art History**

Write an **essay** of roughly 1500 words

# Assessment literacy explored

What it is to be a competent student has radically changed. [As a consequence, what it is to be a competent teacher has changed too]. Both students and staff require a particular and new kind of understanding of educational competence in the domain of assessment

What is assessment literacy?

How should it be developed?

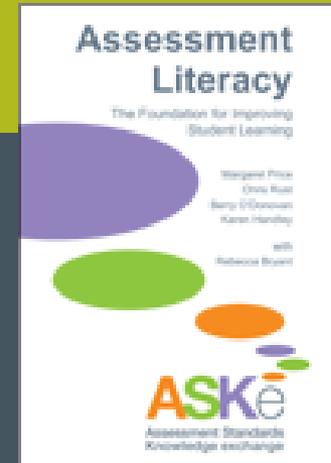
# Assessment Literacy

1. Used in the context of skills and associated with attributes of fluency and competence
2. Slowly learnt 'gateway' or 'threshold' skills which, once mastered, allow access, not only to further learning and knowledge, but also to academic communities, their practices and standards (Yorke, 2001; Gourlay, 2009; Meyer and Land, 2006)
3. Embedded in competencies, knowledge, and skills which in turn, are situated in a much wider context with broader benefits (Boud, 2009)
4. Context is made up of social and cultural factors/signifiers, which are interpreted and internalised by individuals who bring their own historical, social and cultural narratives (Torrance, 2011)

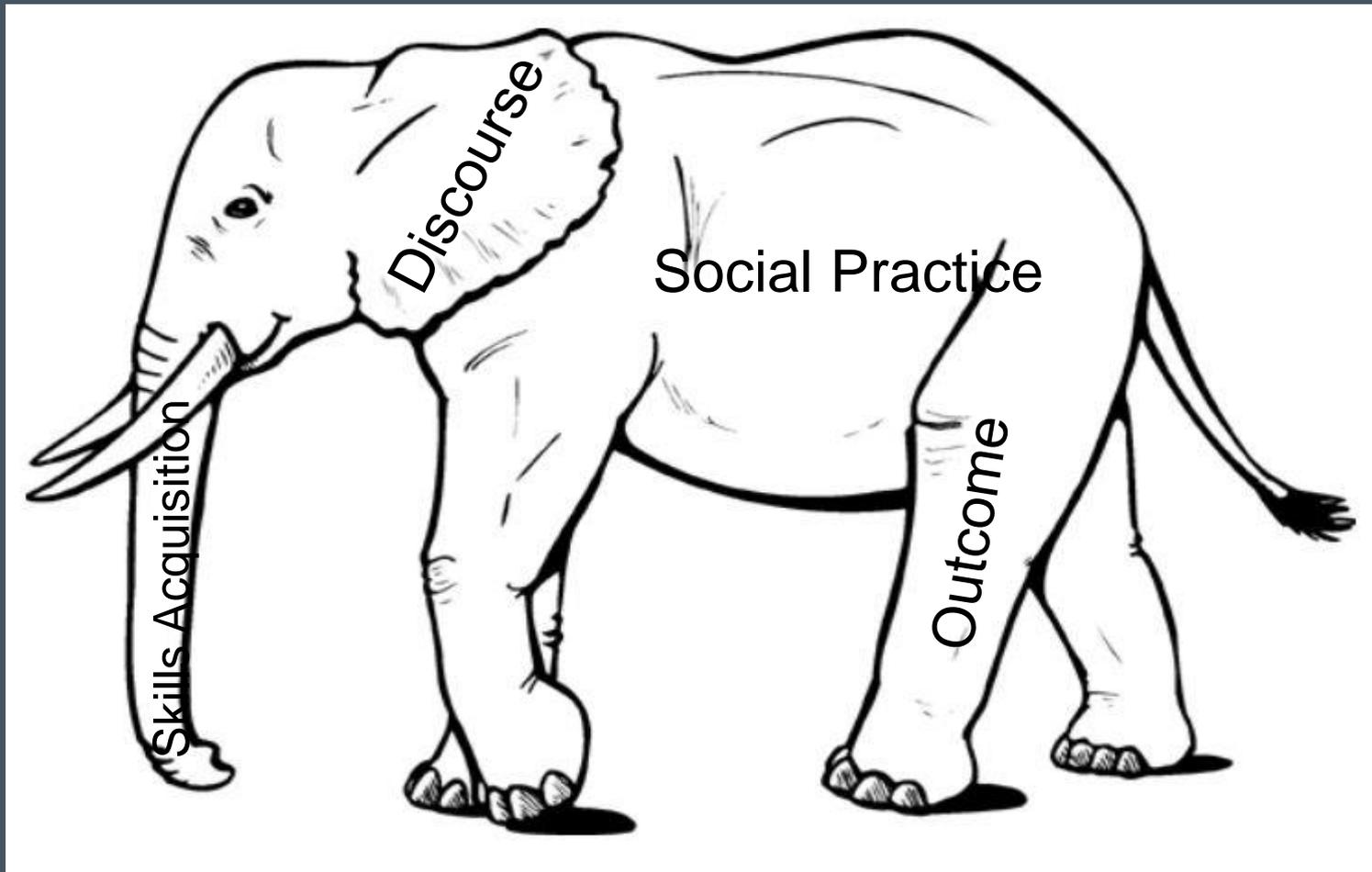
# Assessment Literacy

- appreciation of assessment's relationship to learning;
- conceptual understanding* of assessment
- understanding of the nature, meaning and level of assessment criteria and standards;
- skills in self- and peer assessment;
- familiarity with *technical approaches* to assessment
- possession of the intellectual ability to select and apply appropriate approaches and techniques to assessed tasks

(Price et al, 2012)



# Different ways of looking at assessment literacy



# Assessment literacy research project

*Data from student audio diaries :*

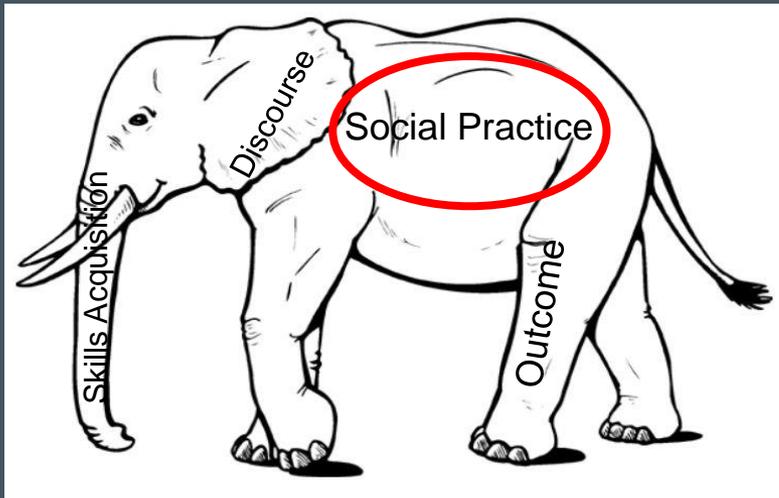
Negotiation of the assignment

Reflection on assessment performance

Assessment relationships

- Jack: History, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 19 yrs
- George: Technology, foundation year, 53 yrs
- Alex: Law and History, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 20 yrs
- Susan: Psychology, MSc, 48 yrs

# Assessment literacy as social practice: becoming part of the gang (or not)



- “We learn what we are supposed to be in order to be accepted as learners” – Francisco Varela
- Assessment as proxy of learning what needs to be learned
- Social practice of assessment literacy: acceptance or rejection by the learning community

# Negotiation processes to access academic communities: **Jack**

“I don’t tend to like contextualisation pieces of work because I find myself very restricted in terms of expressing my own opinion of matters...I think that’s exactly it, it very much feels like with a contextualisation piece like this, as much as it feels important in terms of grasping the course itself and it’s a very highly intellectual piece of work, it feels it’s not very creative at all. And this is something I tend to feel across the course wherein the nature of studying history, it seems, at degree level is studying other people’s opinions”

# Negotiation processes to access academic communities: **George**

“Again, I can’t really complain, I mean I’ve been bored out of my skull every lesson we go there and I can’t really complain because I’ve got a 70% pass mark and if that was a degree that would be a First. So I should be happy with what I’ve done, but I’m not really because I feel that I’m capable of so much more”

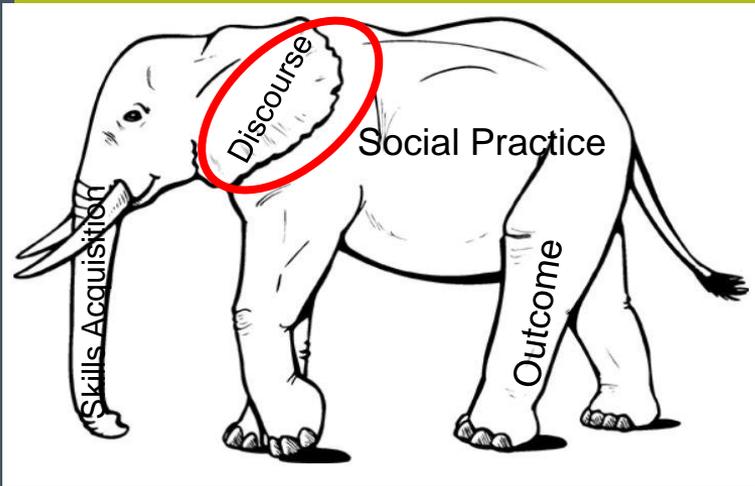
# Negotiation processes to access academic communities: **Alex**

“Back to this assessment, I am slightly disappointed. I didn't put in 100% so I'm not going to be that upset because I know that if I'd put 100%, 110% maybe I would have got a better mark. I think that's what I'm learning that any time I do assessments I need to give it my 110% or my 200% so that I can feel satisfied that yes, this is the mark I'm supposed to get or this is the mark I have worked hard for or deserve.”

# Negotiation processes to access academic communities: Susan

“it’s very difficult to tie the supervisor down in terms of time; he’ll book an appointment for two o’clock and then you turn up at two o’clock and says he’s too busy, which I think he’s done every single time that I’ve gone to see him. So that’s really frustrating because that kind of says that his time’s more important than mine. Having said that I don’t want to be too bullish about it because I’m told that he gets excellent results from his students, I don’t want to antagonise him because I’m sure he will eventually draw the best out of me”

# Assessment literacy as discourse:



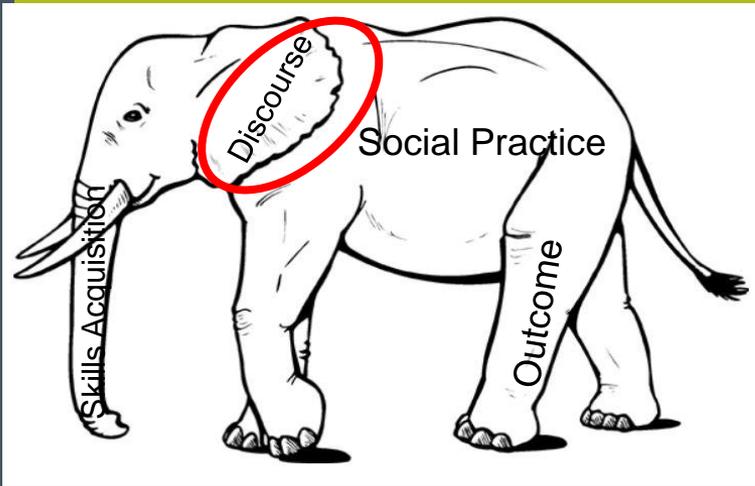
Understanding the conventions and skilful compliance

=

assessment literacy?

- “It’s not been marked in accordance with what it set out to be done, I hate injustice” – *Fairness of assessment*
- “I shouldn’t do any more work on it... it’s only 30%” – *Cost/benefit of assessment*
- “‘Excellently analysed’ or ‘poorly analysed’, what does that mean in a real context?” - *Seeking guidance and rules, not freedom*
- “Getting a B+ is hardly worth getting out of bed for” - *Importance of marks*
- “It’s a bonus to know you’ve done better than others” – *Competition in assessment*

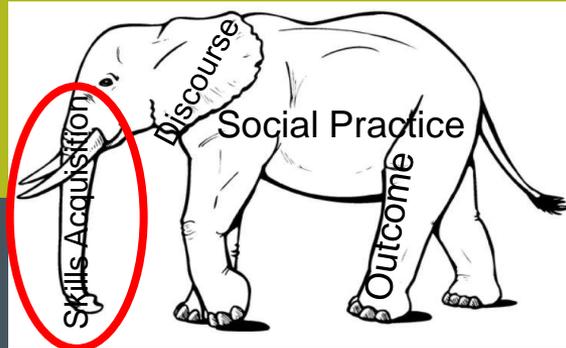
# Assessment literacy as discourse:



Assessment literacy  
=  
taking a critical  
stance and becoming  
responsible for who  
we are

- “As long as you are driven... assessment is ultimately not important” – *Diminished importance of formal assessment, marks, and competition*
- “I’m so snuggled into what I’m doing and I’m so excited by it” - *Importance of love of own subject*
- “I feel the things I am finding out are useful things” - *Increased importance of own standards*
- “The feedback recognised my knowledge” – *Assessment confirms what student already knows*

# Assessment literacy as skill acquisition



Developmental

Experiential

Situated

Expertise

Novice

Advanced  
Beginner

Competence

Proficiency

# Intentional development of assessment literacy

What can we do?

1. Planning at programme level
2. Pre-assessment
3. Assessment activity
4. Feedback
5. Beyond the programme

# Programme level

## Student expectations on entry to a business and management programme

*A good teacher knows lots of 'right answers' and can:*

- 1. Make things simple*
- 2. Help students memorise key points in interesting ways*

*Assessment is about measurement and should be FAIR above all else.*

*Knowledge is certain and uncontested*

*There are 'right answers' and 'key points' that students must memorise*

*The knowledge you learn at school and university is mainly irrelevant to day-to-day life*

*Discussion with peers can be both muddling and time wasting*



# Programme level: things to bear in mind

- Staff team having a programme view
  - Where there is a greater sense of the holistic programme, students are more likely to achieve the learning outcomes than students on programmes with a more fragmented sense of the programme. (Havnes, 2007)
- Effects of conflating summative and formative assessment (Price et al 2010, Black and Wiliam, 1998)
- Variety in assessment is not always a good thing
  - It is clear how disconcerting students find a large range of assessment activities. It is far better to limit these so students get better at using the feedback to improve performance. (Gibbs, 2011)
- Importance of interaction and participation in community (Astin, 1993; Gibbs, 2007)

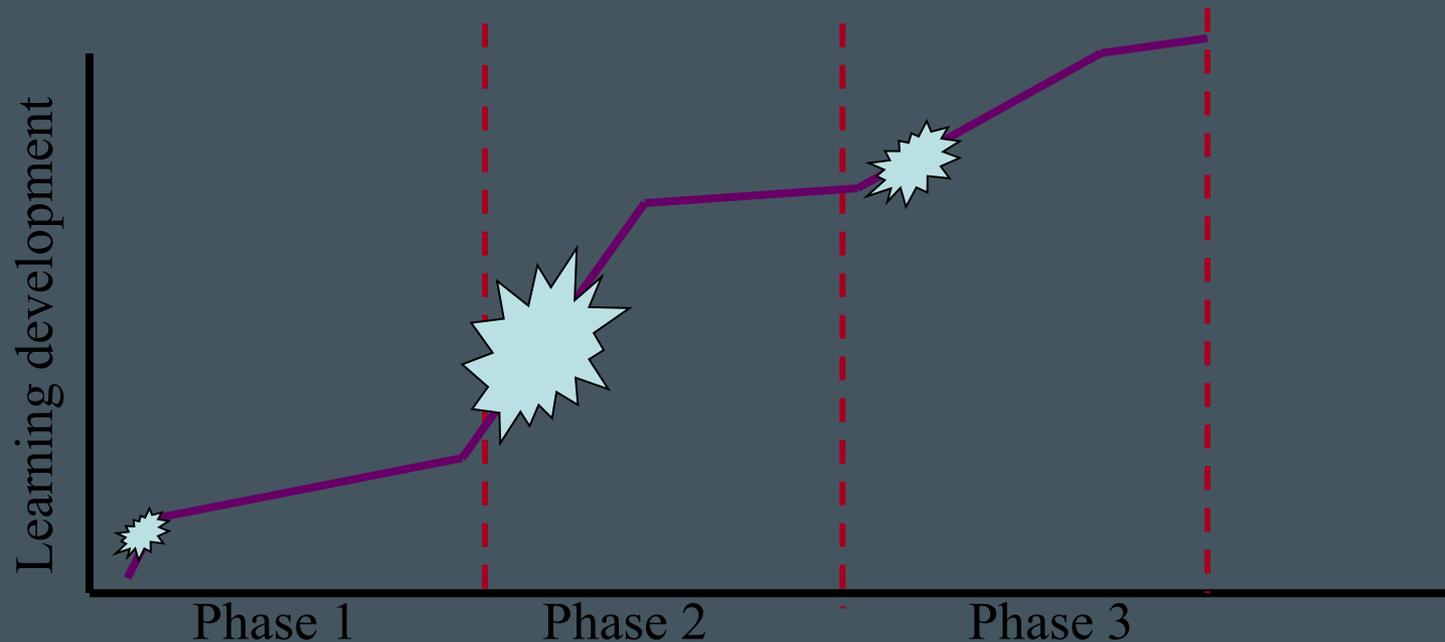
# Programme level: things to think about

1. Be clear why and how you are developing assessment literacy
2. Plan for students to be less dependent – early in the programme scaffold assessment and model feedback use
3. What does it look like in your discipline?
4. Plan assessment to meet programme learning outcomes
5. Identify critical points where students need support.
6. Recognise that some aspects of literacy need long term support e.g. use of and support for assessed groupwork, supporting development of self assessment

# Critical learning (and assessment moments)

Radical movement involving zones of discomfort, '*threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge*' (Meyer and Land, 2006)

Changes in 'epistemology and knowledge structures' (Basil Bernstein in Moore et al, 2006)



# Pre assessment

1. Negotiating assessment. Ensure assessment briefs and briefing are clear to students.
2. Understanding expectations. Ensure students understand the standards expected – use exemplars, marking exercises (e.g. see 123 leaflets).
3. Self efficacy. Listen to the questions the students are asking – how many references do I need? what do I have to do to pass?

# Assessment standards are difficult

Assessment judgements rely on local, contextualised interpretations of quality underpinned by tacit understanding of 'quality' shared by members of an assessment community

(Knight, 2006)

A key issue in assessment is that students often do not understand what is a better piece of work and do not understand what is being asked of them particularly in terms of standards and criteria.

(O'Donovan et al., 2001)

# Assessment standards are difficult

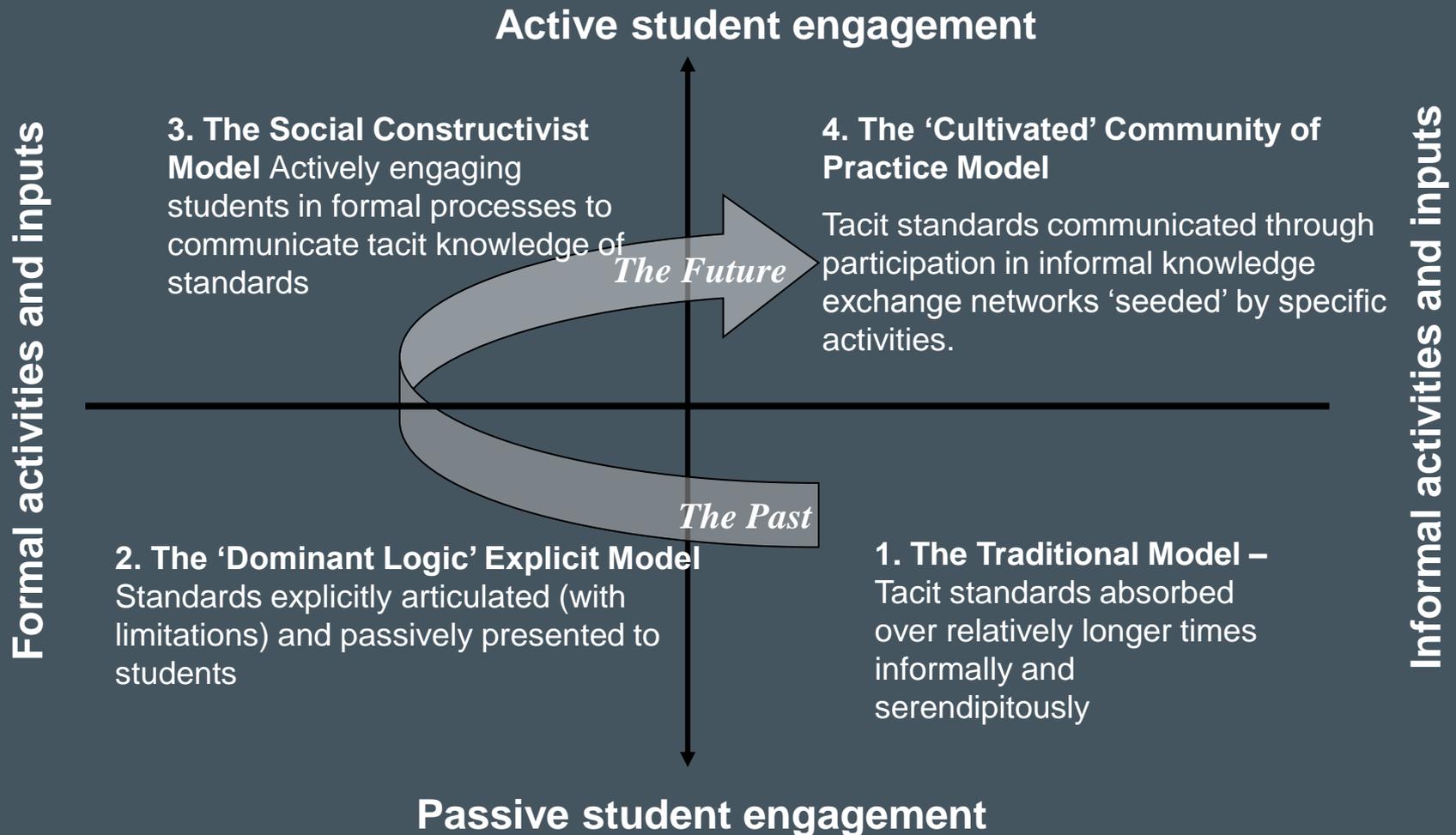
Assessors apply different interpretations of key words and phrases within written 'standards' (Saunders and Davis 1998; Ecclestone, 2001, Webster et al., 2000)

Written specifications cannot be applied mechanistically, judgement is required (Bloxham 2009)

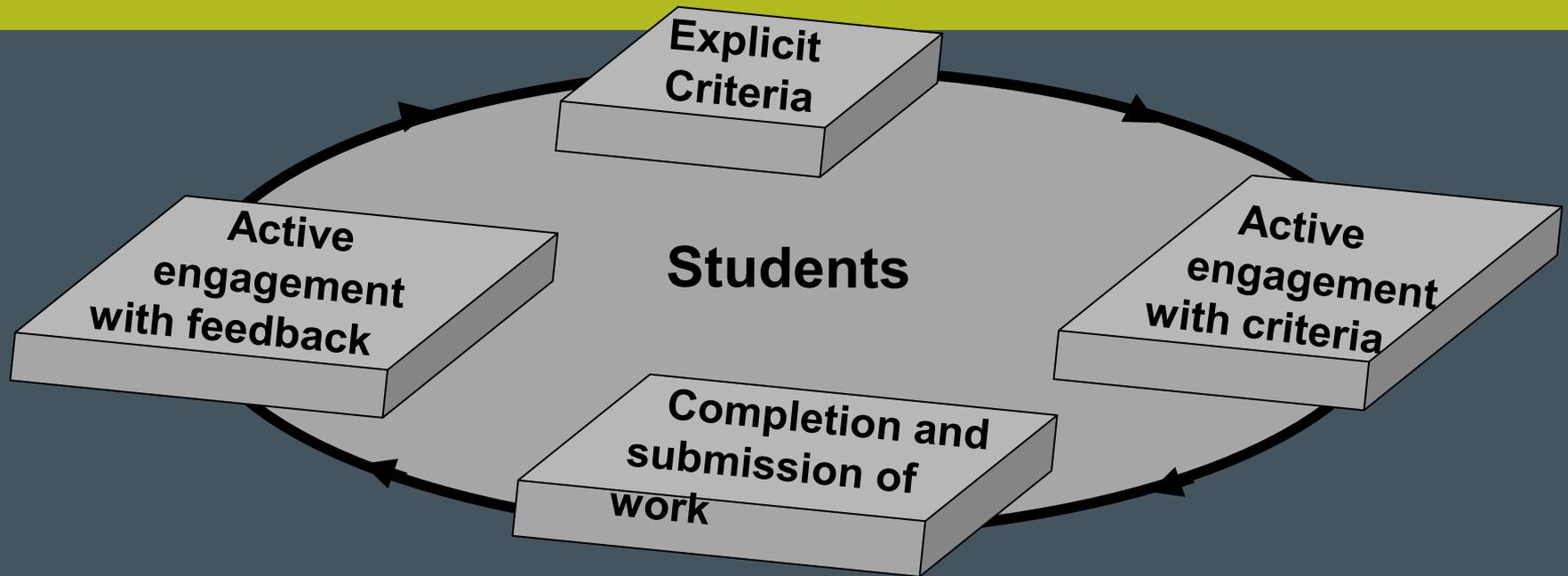
“Standards are not conceptualised as having an existence or relevance separately from the context of the teaching team, the course as it was taught and its current students” (Sadler 2005 p190)

Greater precision is inherently self defeating (O'Donovan et al 2004)

# Coming to understand standards



# Supporting students



Rust C., O'Donovan B. & Price M. (2005)

# Assessment activity

Students must learn to and identify their performance gap for themselves

*'in the act of production itself'* (Sadler, 1989, p121).

Self assessment

Evaluating against generic commentary

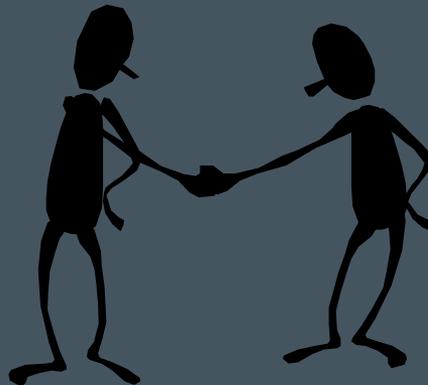
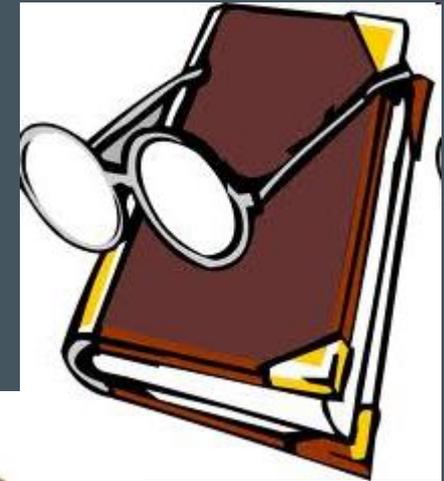
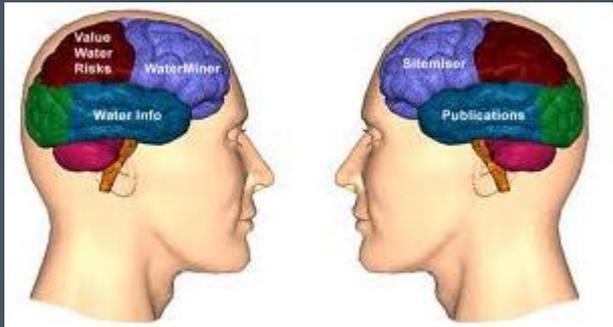
Drafting and redrafting

Peer review

Peer assessment

Peer assisted learning

# Post assessment



# Feedback and assessment literacy: the need to engage

## Findings from FDTL Engaging Students with Assessment Feedback:

### Clarity of purpose

Learning effectiveness (and student engagement) is strongly influenced by opportunity to apply feedback to future performance This relies on

- ability to understand feedback (legibility and interpretation)
- expectations of the utility of feedback
- perception of self efficacy

The relational dimension of feedback is key to student engagement

Dialogue supports understanding and engagement

(Price et al 2010)

# Feedback – the importance of what has gone before

1. Be clear about the purpose of the feedback ie what should students expect to get from it in particular instances.
2. Ensure students have had sufficient support in understanding criteria and standards to relate to the feedback provided.
3. Require students to self assess against generic/cohort feedback.
4. Model the process of feeding forward for the students.
5. Require students to demonstrate how they have used feedback in subsequent work.

# Assessment literacy and community?

## Staff

- Assessment confidence (Handley et al, in press)
- Discourse of assessment and feedback dialogue (Price, 2005)

## Students

- Self evaluative ability, independent learning and employability (Boud, 2009)
- Confidence and capability to participate
- Useful evaluation of experience (Price et al 2010)

# Addressing the position we find ourselves in: developing assessment literacy

Assessment literacy:

- Redefines the role of the student,
- Nudges the culture of HE organisations,
- Challenges environmental factors  
(rules and regs, role of communities, allocation of resources, professionalisation of teachers).
- Allows students to go beyond rating the satisfaction with assessment and feedback 'service' to **evaluating the effect on their learning.**