Help students to help themselves: developing assessment literacy

Prof. Margaret Price
Director,
ASKe Pedagogy Research Centre
Faculty of Business

http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske
Why assessment literacy

Staff

• Assessment confidence (Handley et al, 2013)
• Acknowledging professional judgement
• 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)
appreciation of assessment’s relationship to learning;

conceputal 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
possessions of the intellectual ability to select and apply appropriate approaches and techniques to assessed tasks

(Price et al, 2012)
What can we do?

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

• Staff team need 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)

• Assessment strategy
  o A coherent plan of assessment and feedback across the programme
  o Deliberate development of assessment literacy

• Importance of interaction and participation in community
  (Astin, 1993; Gibbs, 2007)
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

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

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

Discussion with peers can be both muddling and time wasting

(O’Donovan, 2010)
Student expectations (at transitions)

What are your students’ expectations of learning and assessment

• when they first arrive in HE?
• When they enter transition between stages of study (e.g. years)

• What do you do to help structure those expectations? (fill in the table)
Perception of a modular programme?

Phase 1

Phase 2

Phase 3

Learning development
Critical learning (threshold concepts, assessment and feedback moments)
Programme level approach

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)

“Some skills, literacies, conceptual understandings are ‘slowly learnt’ and need rehearsal throughout a programme” (Yorke, 2001)

Focus on reliability is not always a good thing

“This quest for reliability tends to skew assessment towards the assessment of simple and unambiguous achievements, and considerations of cost add to the skew away from judgements of complex learning’ (Knight 2002).

...a declining use of deep and contextual approaches to study as students’ progress through their degree programmes

Pre assessment

Students need to

• learn how to negotiate an assessment task
• understand expectations (standards)
• develop learn self efficacy (what questions should they be asking about assessment tasks)
What should the students ask?

FOR A FAIR SELECTION EVERYBODY HAS TO TAKE THE SAME EXAM: PLEASE CLIMB THAT TREE
Negotiating an assessment task

Pre requisites:

• Good assessment design
• Clear assessment briefs (including purpose)
• Clarity about rules
Student experience

Explicit Criteria

Active engagement with feedback

Completion and submission of work

Developing assessment literacy

Students

Explicit Criteria

Active engagement with feedback

Completion and submission of work

Developing assessment literacy - Pre assessment

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

1. The Traditional Model – Tacit standards absorbed over relatively longer times informally and serendipitously.

2. The ‘Dominant Logic’ Explicit Model
   Standards explicitly articulated (with limitations) and passively presented to students.

3. The Social Constructivist Model
   Actively engaging students in formal processes to communicate tacit knowledge of standards.

4. The ‘Cultivated’ Community of Practice Model
   Tacit standards communicated through participation in informal knowledge exchange networks ‘seeded’ by specific activities.

O’Donovan et al, 2008)
1. The Traditional Model
- Tacit standards absorbed over relatively longer times informally and serendipitously

2. The ‘Dominant Logic’ Explicit Model
- Standards explicitly articulated (with limitations) and passively presented to students

3. The Social Constructivist Model
- Actively engaging students in formal processes to communicate tacit knowledge of standards

4. The ‘Cultivated’ Community of Practice Model
- Tacit standards communicated through participation in informal knowledge exchange networks ‘seeded’ by specific activities.

O’Donovan, Price & Rust 2008
Active student engagement

1. The Traditional Model
   - Tacit standards absorbed over relatively longer times informally and serendipitously

2. The ‘Dominant Logic’ Explicit Model
   - Standards explicitly articulated (with limitations) and passively presented to students

3. The Social Constructivist Model
   - Actively engaging students in formal processes to communicate tacit knowledge of standards

4. The ‘Cultivated’ Community of Practice Model
   - Tacit standards communicated through participation in informal knowledge exchange networks ‘seeded’ by specific activities.

The Past

1. The Traditional Model
   - Tacit standards absorbed over relatively longer times informally and serendipitously

2. The ‘Dominant Logic’ Explicit Model
   - Standards explicitly articulated (with limitations) and passively presented to students

The Future

3. The Social Constructivist Model
   - Actively engaging students in formal processes to communicate tacit knowledge of standards

4. The ‘Cultivated’ Community of Practice Model
   - Tacit standards communicated through participation in informal knowledge exchange networks ‘seeded’ by specific activities.

O’Donovan, Price & Rust 2008
Active student engagement

3. The Social Constructivist Model
   Actively engaging students in formal processes to communicate tacit knowledge of standards

4. The ‘Cultivated’ Community of Practice Model
   Tacit standards communicated through participation in informal knowledge exchange networks ‘seeded’ by specific activities.

2. The ‘Dominant Logic’ Explicit Model
   Standards explicitly articulated (with limitations) and passively presented to students

1. The Traditional Model – Tacit standards absorbed over relatively longer times informally and serendipitously

Passive student engagement
1. The Traditional Model
- Tacit standards absorbed over relatively longer times informally and serendipitously.

2. The ‘Dominant Logic’ Explicit Model
- Standards explicitly articulated (with limitations) and passively presented to students.

3. The Social Constructivist Model
- Actively engaging students in formal processes to communicate tacit knowledge of standards.

4. The ‘Cultivated’ Community of Practice Model
- Tacit standards communicated through participation in informal knowledge exchange networks ‘seeded’ by specific activities.

O’Donovan, Price & Rust 2008
Developing assessment literacy - Assessment activity

Assessment activity

Students must learn to and identify their performance gap for themselves

‘in the act of production itself’ (Sadler, 1989, p121).

Self assessment
Drafting and redrafting
Peer review
Peer assessment
Peer assisted learning
Developing assessment literacy

- Explicit Criteria
- Active engagement with criteria
- Completion and submission of work
- Active engagement with 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)
Students’ perceptions of feedback

Domains of influence to be discussed at ‘What makes good feedback good?’

Day 2 1.30pm
Feedback – the importance of what has gone before and what is to come

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.
Feedback moments to support assessment literacy

Where there is a clear need to apply feedback

Pre assessment

Reflection points

Identify them within each programme
Feedback methods:
- Dialogue (one to one/and feedback workshop)
- Oral/audio rather than written
- Exemplars/model answers
- Generic feedback

Require students to demonstrate how they have used feedback in subsequent work.