

Should learners collaborate with teachers to develop assessment marking criteria?

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In 2015 the authors were awarded a university research seed grant to implement a facilitation strategy underpinned by socio-constructivist guidelines for assessment practice in a first-year engineering foundation year unit focused on the study of processes and practices of humanitarian engineering design. The facilitation strategy involved introducing assessment-oriented activities in which learners actively engage with pre-set assessment marking. A qualitative evaluative inquiry that was simultaneously conducted by the authors revealed that the learners found the facilitation strategy to be useful. However, the learners also reported that misinterpretation of marking criteria still occurred. The inquiry highlighted a need for the facilitation strategy to include opportunities that allowed for greater shared understanding of assessment marking criteria. The authors considered that instead of working entirely with preset marking criteria whose development does not involve learners, a more viable alternative would be to give learners and teachers an opportunity to collaborate on developing a set of mutually valued emergent marking criteria. Evidence-based research on assessment and feedback practices in higher education encourages the implementation of such a strategy (Price, Carroll, O'Donovan, & Rust, 2011). However, it has also been noted that such alternatives are rarely implemented (Coward, 2006). When the authors sought to implement a facilitation strategy to involve learners directly in the development of appropriate assessment marking criteria, they encountered institutional resistance.

Literature on higher education assessment and feedback practices keenly promotes a more learning and learner-centric approach. Recommendations have been made that suggest the need to include learners as important stakeholders in the community of assessment and feedback practice if assessment and feedback are aimed at the promotion of learning. Criterion-referenced assessments and feedback are widely implemented in higher education and they are by nature inescapably interpretive. Direct student-teacher collaboration to develop and define assessment marking criteria creates the opportunity to generate a shared understanding and valuing of assessment expectations. To educators who espouse socio-constructivist principles for the practice of learning, teaching, assessment and feedback, this kind of student-teacher collaboration would be vital. However, higher education policies appear to prefer pre-set assessment marking criteria. It would be fair to say that student-teacher collaboration in the development and definition of assessment marking criteria can be regarded as a contentious issue. To date, discourse is sparse regarding the inclusion /exclusion of students into assessment processes and practices.

Owing to the above rationale as well the resistance they have encountered in their lived experience, the authors propose to debate whether learners should collaborate with teachers to develop assessment marking criteria?

References

- Coward, J. (2006). *On becoming an innovative university teacher: reflection in action* (2nd ed.). Buckingham, UK: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
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