Challenges for reforming assessment: the next decade

David Boud
Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning, Deakin University
Emeritus Professor, University of Technology Sydney
Centre for Work and Learning, Middlesex University
Outline

Introduction
[Assessment includes all judgements of students in tests, examinations, assignments, projects, etc.]

Part 1
Review of assessment change: the last decade
Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education

Part 2
The next ten years?
Assessment makes an impact, *whether we like it or not*

- Communicates to students what we value
- Sets priorities for study
- Over-emphasises some things over others
- Distributes students’ time across the year
- Inhibits cooperation and collaboration between students
What does assessment always need to do?

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<tr>
<th>Ensure</th>
<th>Provide</th>
<th>Build</th>
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| Ensure that learning outcomes have been met  
  • Summative assessment  | Provide students with useful information to aid learning now  
  • Formative assessment | Build students’ capacity to judge their own learning  
  • Sustainable assessment |
Part 1
What has been achieved in assessment reform?

Focus on:
Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education
2010 national project to change university assessment activities

Involved:

- Key higher education assessment experts
- Key personnel with assessment responsibilities
- Senior academic leaders
- All Australian universities

Aim:

- To reach a consensus on key changes in assessment to support learning for the next ten years
Assessment 2020 Propositions (a)

ASSESSMENT HAS MOST EFFECT WHEN:

1. it is used to engage students in learning that is productive
2. feedback is used to actively improve student learning
3. students and teachers become responsible partners in learning and assessment
Assessment 2020 Propositions (b)

ASSESSMENT HAS MOST EFFECT WHEN:

4. students are inducted into the assessment practices and cultures of higher education
5. assessment for learning is placed at the centre of subject and program design
6. assessment for learning is a focus for staff and institutional development
7. assessment provides inclusive and trustworthy representation of student achievement
What has changed in the last ten years?

• Assessment still influences learning for good and for bad
• Peer learning and feedback activities have grown
• Rise of interest in learning skills in first year—called: transition pedagogy
• Active assessment design is discussed
• Assurance of learning is now on the agenda
• Training for university teachers is now common
Other major changes in assessment

• Move away from rules-based institutional assessment policies to principles-based

• The rise of authentic assessment
What problems of assessment remain?

• Assessment is not related to learning outcomes
• Assessment creates poor study habits, eg. excessive memorisation
• Reliance on a limited range of poorly-designed assessment methods
• Portrayal of achievements is archaic
Part 2
The next ten years?

Completing the move to a standards-based framework for assessment

- Assuring learning
- Authentic assessment

Repositioning students as learners and producers

A. Developing students’ evaluative judgement
B. Making feedback work properly for learning
C. New forms of portrayal of achievements
What does a standards-based approach demand of assessment?

- Judging whether students can demonstrate attainment of learning outcomes to a given standard.
  - Poor achievement on one outcome cannot be compensated for by good achievement on another
- Transparent standards must be established for assessment tasks
  - Setting a pass mark is not setting a standard!
  - Setting a general set of standards for courses is not enough
  - Grade Point Averages are not meaningful
- All assessment must be standards-based
  - Norm-referencing (judging students against each other) is wrong
Completing the move to a standards-based framework for assessment

- Meaningful statements of learning outcomes
- Clarity about threshold learning outcomes
- Consider assessment across the whole student program
- Replace legacy assessment record-keeping systems
- Assure learning outcomes
- Authentic assessment
Standards and learning outcomes

• Learning outcomes provide the discourse for all that students do
• Clarity about the key decision: what is the threshold/minimum standard for each?
• Relate course-wide learning outcomes with course unit/subject outcomes
• Summative assessment is assuring learning outcomes

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Assessment design: key occasions

Curriculum mapping
For each program learning outcome, in which units are there assessment events that represent:
• Introductory level standard
• Developing level standard
• Mastery level standard (when appropriate)
• Graduation level assurance

Can these be traced, audited, in a way convincing to an external audience, ourselves and our students?

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Repositioning students as learners and producers

A. Developing students’ evaluative judgement
B. Reconceptualising and reframing feedback
C. New portrayals of achievements
Repositioning students as learners and producers

- Shift student identity from ‘student’ to ‘learner’
- Demand activity throughout
- Avoid unilateral decisions
A. Developing evaluative judgement

• If students can’t judge the quality of their own work, how can they learn effectively?
• If graduates can’t judge the quality of their own work, how can they practice effectively?
• If they can’t help each other judge the quality of their work, how can they work effectively with each other?
Evaluative judgement is:

‘the capability to make informed decisions about the quality of work of self and others’

Why a new term?

• Self-assessment has been misunderstood and misused, especially in some disciplines
• Evaluative judgement focuses attention on what graduates need to be capable of, no matter what their course
• Establishes a goal to be pursued, not an activity in which students engage
• Positions assessment as an act to inform learners judgement, not one which makes unilateral decisions about learners
Don’t we all do it anyway?

• Yes, but:
  • It is often not explicit
  • It is rarely a systemic focus
  • It gets distracted by the fragmentation of the curriculum, multiple placements, etc.
  • Existing teaching, learning and, particularly, assessment practices inhibit it
Integral components of evaluative judgement

Understanding notions of quality

- Using exemplars
- Observing performance
- Discussing performance
- Discussing criteria
- Discussing standards
- Engaging with models
- Receiving feedback information

Making comparisons

- Giving feedback information
- Evaluating own performance
- Developing rubrics/criteria
- Assessing others against criteria/rubrics
- Discussing performance
- Discussing feedback information
B. Reconceptualising and reframing feedback

This is* not* feedback:
“I left feedback on their essays, which they never collected”
What is feedback?

“What is feedback?

“Feedback is a process in which learners make sense of information about their performance and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies.”
How do we make feedback learning-centred?

- Stop using the word ‘feedback’ to refer to unsolicited information given to students by teachers
- Have students initiate feedback processes
- Expect a response to information provided—what action will occur?
- Use multiple sources—teachers, peers, practitioners, whoever is useful
- Organise subsequent tasks so that students can apply what they have learned from the feedback process
C. New portrayals of achievement

The problem:

• A final transcript with a list of subjects and grades is not useful
• Students need to differentiate themselves from many other graduates
• Students need to communicate with those who will employ them and with professional colleagues
New portrayals of achievement

Solutions:
• An electronic repository of all achievements, digitally credentialed where possible
• Curation of this repository to portray achievements to different parties
• Assessment activities unique to a student that connect to the world
What next?

• What are your priorities for assessment reform?
• How will you influence policy and practice?
• How will you avoid being party to counterproductive assessment practices?
Conclusion

Assessment must:

• be deliberately designed to have a continuing positive influence on student learning—equipping them for the future, not judged on the past

• build students’ capacity to judge their own work and that of others—the educational outcome on which all others are dependent

• equip students for the future, not primarily through the specific knowledge and skills they acquire, but through their capacity to make informed decisions
References


