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
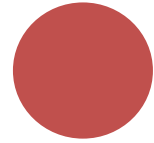
What does assessment always need to do?

Ensure	Provide	Build
Ensure that learning outcomes have been met	Provide students with useful information to aid learning now	Build students' capacity to judge their own learning
• Summative assessment	• Formative assessment	• 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

Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education

Preamble

Universities face substantial change in a rapidly evolving global context. The challenges of meeting new expectations about academic standards in the next decade and beyond mean that assessment will need to be rethought and renewed.

This document provides a stimulus for those involved in the redevelopment of assessment practices. It draws on the expertise of a group of highly experienced assessment researchers, academic development practitioners and senior academic managers to identify current best thinking about the ways assessment will need to address immediate and future demands.

Underpinning principles

> Assessment is a central feature of teaching and the curriculum. It powerfully frames how students learn and what students achieve. It is one of the most significant influences on students' experience of higher education and all that they gain from it. The reason for an explicit focus on improving assessment practice is the huge impact it has on the quality of learning.

> Assessment is the making of judgements about how students' work meets appropriate standards. Teachers, markers and examiners have traditionally been charged with that responsibility. However, students themselves need to develop the capacity to make judgements about both their own work and that of others in order to become effective continuing learners and practitioners. .

> Assessment plays a key role in both fostering learning and the certification of students. However, unless it first satisfies the *educational* purpose of ensuring students can identify high quality work and can relate this knowledge to their own work, the likelihood that they will reach high standards themselves is much reduced.

The purposes of the propositions

The propositions have been developed to guide assessment thinking in the light of the increasing focus on standards, and to address criticisms of current practice. They set directions for change designed to enhance learning achievements for all students and improve the quality of their experience.

The propositions, however, do not stand alone. They must be considered within overall curriculum thinking alongside teaching and learning strategies and changing disciplinary content. They need to be supported by a range of development opportunities to foster the shifts in thinking and practice on the part of teaching staff and students that they imply.

The propositions are posed in a form that needs to be embraced and be taken up at different levels - specifically, by educational institutions, by programs and courses of study, and by those responsible for teaching and learning. They have implications for resources and the nature of workload; when addressed thoughtfully they may contribute to reduced costs through a better focusing of effort on those features of the curriculum and teaching that have most direct impact on learning.

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

How did you do?
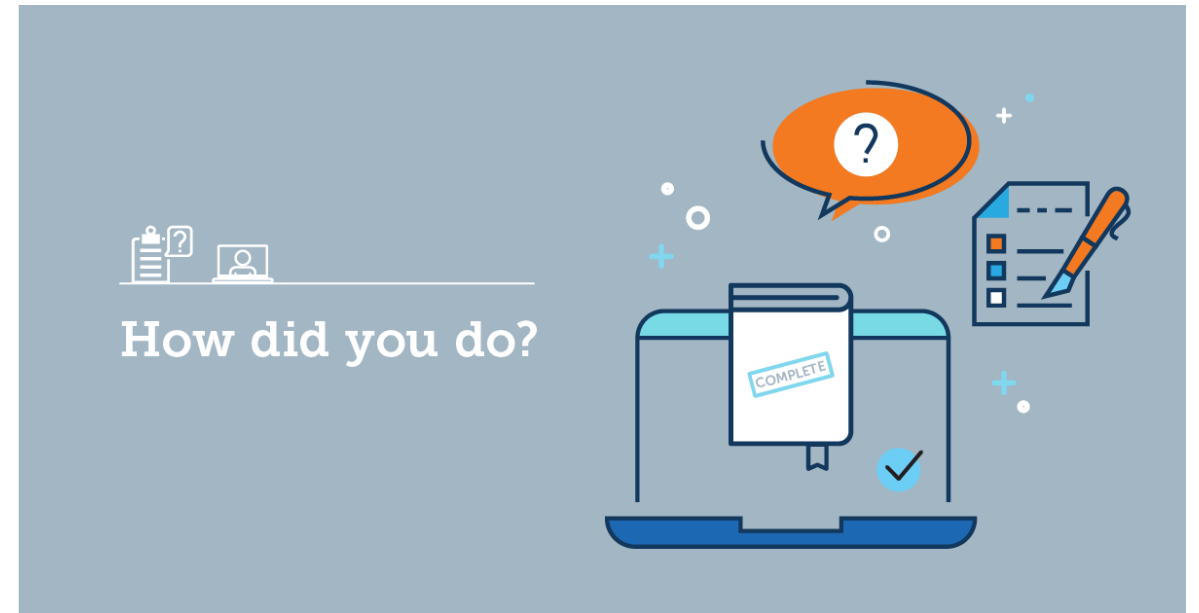
Part 2
The next ten years?

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
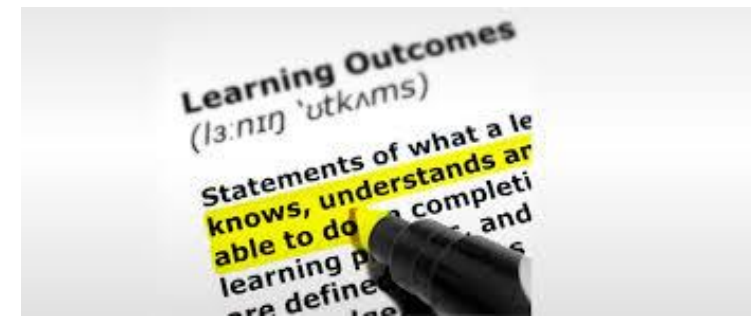
Completing the move to a standards-based framework for assessment

- 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

www.assuringlearning.com
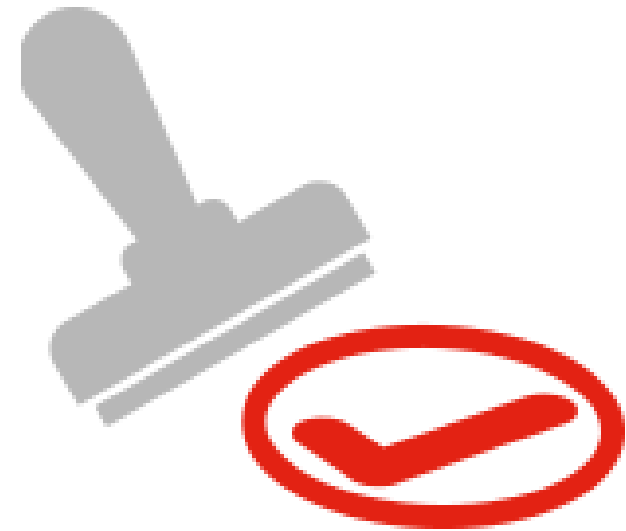
Assessment design: key occasions

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?

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?
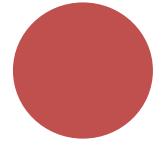
Evaluative judgement is:

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

Tai et al (2018)
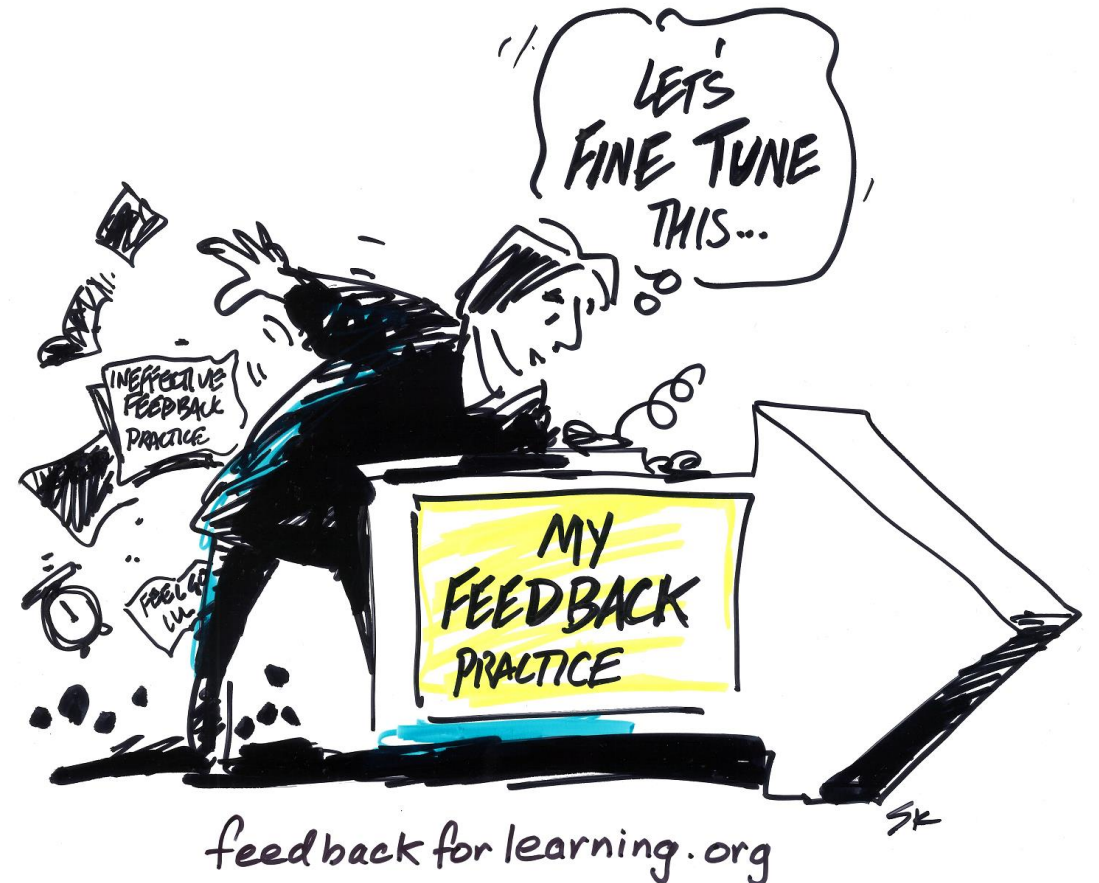
Why a new term?

- 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

David Boud
Rola Ajjawi
Phillip Dawson
Joanna Tai

Developing Evaluative Judgement in Higher Education

ASSESSMENT FOR KNOWING AND PRODUCING QUALITY WORK
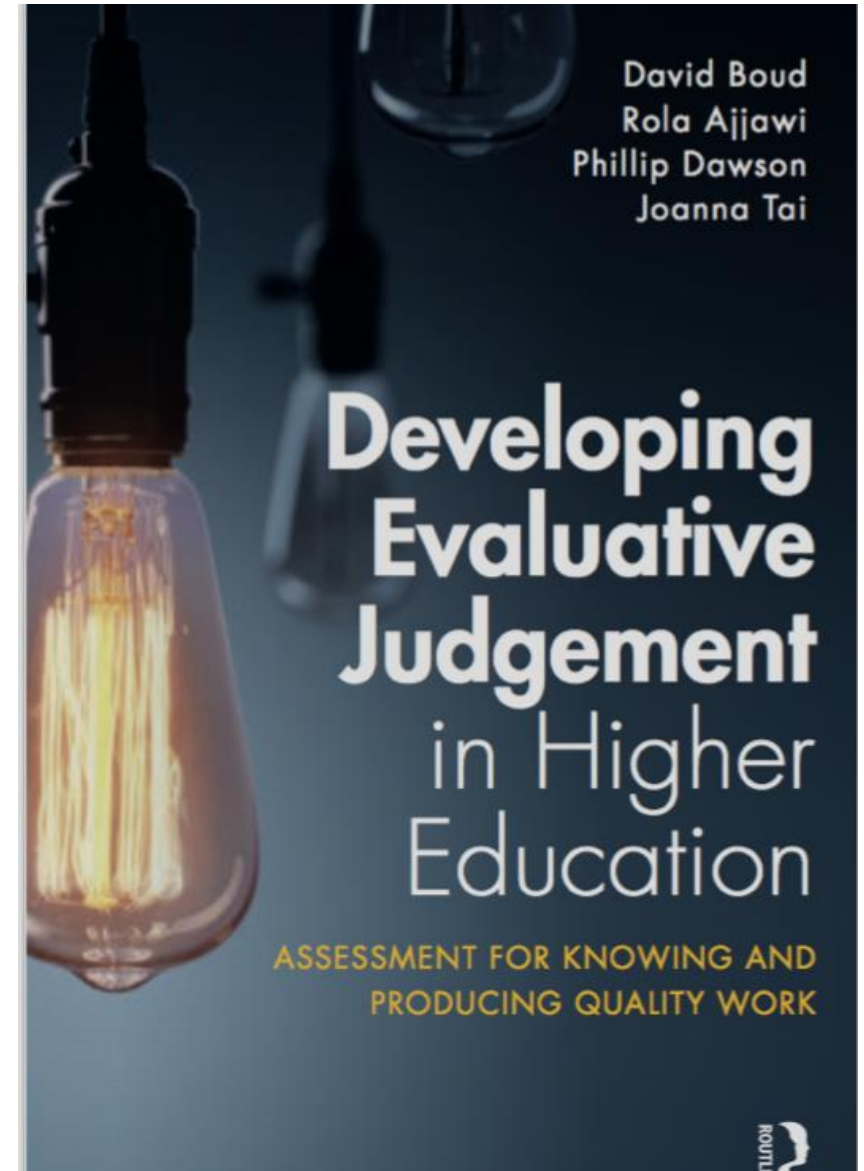
Integral components of evaluative judgement
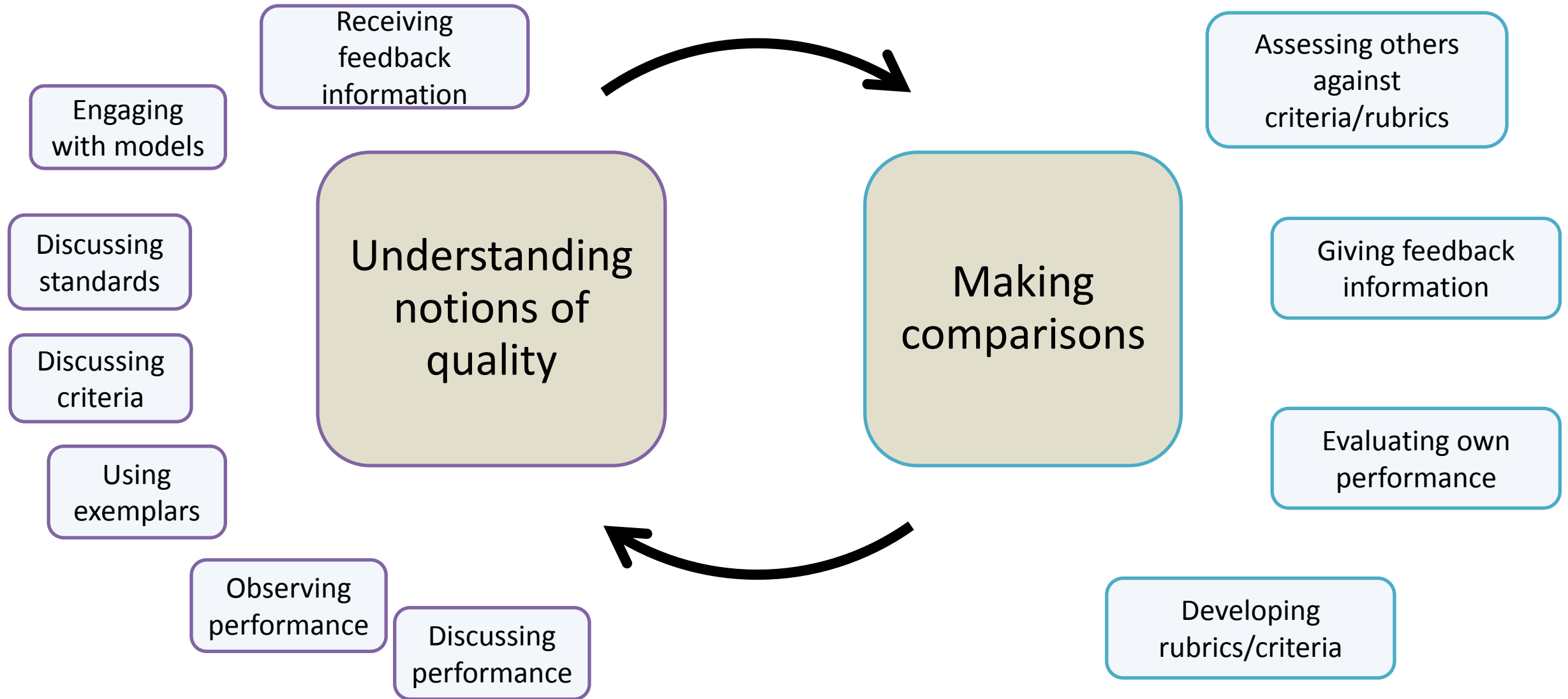
B. Reconceptualising and reframing feedback

This is *not* feedback:

"I left feedback on their essays, which they never collected"

What is feedback?
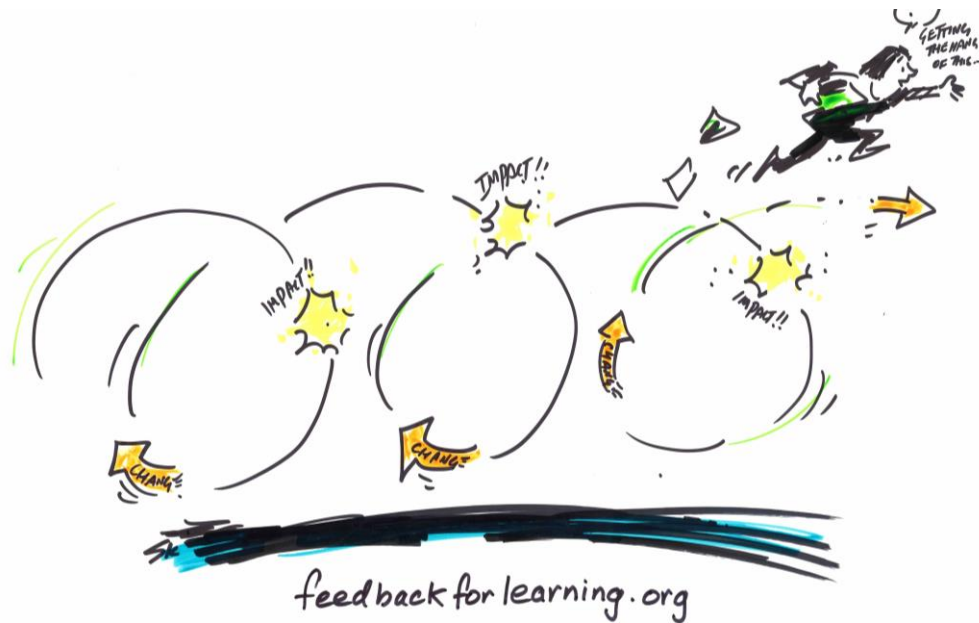
"Feedback is a **process**

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

The Impact of Feedback in Higher Education

Improving Assessment Outcomes for Learners

Edited by Michael Henderson · Rola Ajjawi
David Boud · Elizabeth Molloy

palgrave macmillan

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
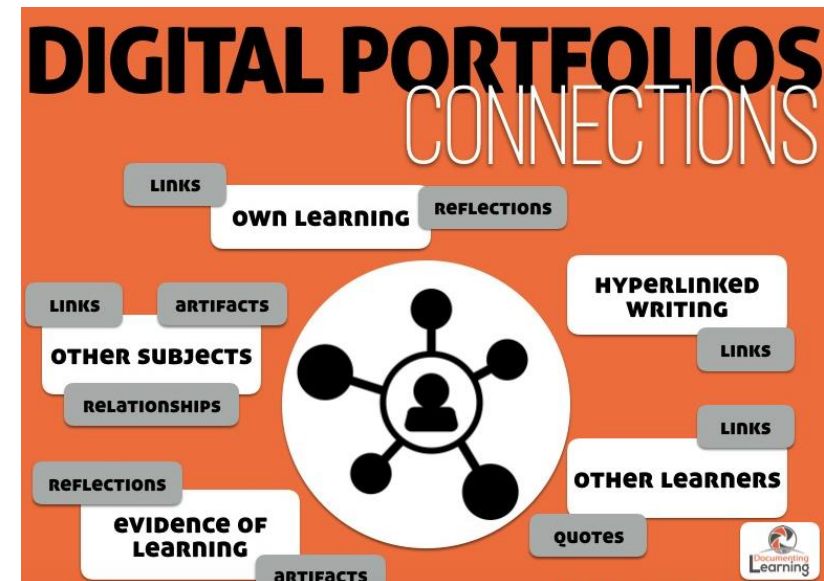
What next?

- 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

OUR JOB IS NOT TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR SOMETHING. OUR JOB IS TO HELP STUDENTS PREPARE THEMSELVES FOR ANYTHING.

– A.J. JULIANI –

References

Ajjawi, R., Bearman, M. and Boud, D. (published online 14 October 2019). Performing standards: A critical perspective on the contemporary use of standards in assessment, *Teaching in Higher Education,* DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2019.1678579

Ajjawi, R., Boud, D. and Marshall, D. (2020). Repositioning assessment-as-portrayal: what can we learn from celebrity and persona studies? In Bearman, M., Dawson, P., Ajjawi, R., Tai, J. & Boud, D. (Eds.) *Re-imagining university assessment in a digital world.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Bearman, M., Dawson, P., Boud, D., Bennett, S., Hall, M. and Molloy, E. (2016) Support for assessment practice: developing the Assessment Design Decisions Framework, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 21, 5, 545-556.

Bearman, M., Dawson, P., Bennett, S., Hall, M., Molloy, E. Boud, D., and Joughin, G. (2017). How university teachers design assessments: a cross disciplinary study, *Higher Education*, 74, 1, 49-64.

Boud, D. (2014). Shifting views of assessment: from secret teacher's business to sustaining learning. In Kreber, C., Anderson, C., Entwistle, N. and McArthur, J. (Eds) *Advances and Innovations in University Assessment and Feedback.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 13-31.

Boud, D. (2017). Standards-based assessment for an era of increasing transparency. In Carless, D., Bridges, S., Chan, C. and Glofcheski, R. (Eds). *Scaling up assessment for learning in higher education.* Dordrecht: Springer, 19-31.

Boud D., Ajjawi R., Dawson P., Tai J. (Eds.). (2018). *Developing Evaluative Judgement in Higher Education:* London: Routledge.

Boud, D. and Molloy, E. (2013). Rethinking models of feedback for learning: the challenge of design. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education,* 38, 6, 698-712.

Boud, D. and Soler, R. (2016). Sustainable assessment revisited, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41, 3, 400-413.

Carless, D. and Boud, D. (2018). The development of student feedback literacy: enabling uptake of feedback, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education,* 43, 8, 1315-1325.

Clarke, J. & Boud, D. (2018). Refocusing portfolio assessment: curating for feedback and portrayal, *Innovations in Education and Teaching International,* 55, 4, 479-486.

Henderson, M., Ryan, T., Boud, D., Dawson, P., Phillips, M., Molloy, E. and Mahoney, P. (published online 16 September 2019). The usefulness of feedback, *Active Learning in Higher Education* DOI: 10.1177/1469787419872393

Ibarra-Sáiz, M. S., Rodríguez-Gómez, G. and Boud, D. (2020), Developing student competence through peer assessment: the role of feedback, self-regulation and evaluative judgement, *Higher Education*, 80, 137-156. DOI: 10.1007/s10734-019-00469-2.

Ibarra-Sáiz, M. S., Rodríguez-Gómez, G. and Boud, D. (published online 8 October 2020). The quality of assessment tasks as a determinant of learning, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2020.1828268

Kift, S., Nelson, K. and Clarke, J. (2010). Transition pedagogy: A third generation approach to FYE - A case study of policy and practice for the higher education sector, *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education,* 1, 1, 1-20.

Molloy, E., Boud, D. and Henderson, M. (2020) Developing a learner-centred framework for feedback literacy, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 45, 4, 527-540. DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2019.1667955

Tai, J., Ajjawi, R., Boud, D., Dawson, P. and Panadero, E. (2018). Developing evaluative judgement: enabling students to make decisions about the quality of work, *Higher Education*, 76:467–481

Winstone, N. E. and Boud, D. (published online 16 June 2020). The need to disentangle assessment and feedback in higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, DOI:10.1080/03075079.2020.1779687

Winstone, N. and Carless, D. (2019). *Designing Effective Feedback Processes in Higher Education: A Learning-Focused Approach*. London: Routledge.