

Title: A dialogic approach to assessment for learning

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Rethink the dominate view of established assessment for learning principles in the literature
- Review their assessment practice against a dialogical framework
- Consider an alternative view where assessment for learning is seen as a dialogue between 1) tutors and learners, 2) tutors and tutors, 3) learners and peers, and finally, 4) learners themselves, i.e. inner dialogue.

Session Outline

This proposed session aims to share with participants a dialogical framework developed from a case study and a critical review of five sets of assessment for learning principles established in the assessment literature.

Assessment for Learning seems to be accepted as conventional wisdom. In recent years, many more principles and models have appeared across the higher education sector such as Gibbs and Simpsons (2004); McDowell (2005) and Nicol (2009). Gibbs (2006), Bloxham and Boyd (2007) question whether the proliferation of publications concerning tips, case studies and good practices about assessment in higher education, are really best practice. Knight and Yorke (2003, p.209) stress that these publications largely represent a “cottage industry”, lacking a systematic theoretical basis for understanding judgements of achievement, and thus “attempts to enhance assessment practices are built on sand” (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007, p.5). Without a clear understanding, Sambell (2013) argues that assessment can become a barrier rather than enabler to student engagement.

After a review of assessment practice within a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the UK, it was found that assessment for learning principles are often applied by staff in a “surface approach” where the underpinning theory is overlooked. To tackle such an issue, a framework is developed by incorporating the core characteristic of assessment for learning principles and four different types of dialogue: 1) tutors and learners, 2) tutors and tutors, 3) learners and peers, and finally, 4) learners themselves, i.e. inner dialogue. Participants will be invited to use this framework to review their own assessment practice in the session and discuss the usefulness and limitations of such a framework. By engaging students and staff in

dialogue through this framework, this session invites participants to challenge some of the “reactive” approaches towards students’ engagement and consider ways to develop an assessment environment that enables, rather than hinders, student engagement.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

10-15 minutes: Present background and findings of case study and the development of the framework

5 minutes: introduce the framework and the review activity

15 minutes: Review activity – (individually) participants to use the framework to review their own assessment practice and (in groups) discuss with others their review.

10 minutes: Feedback from participants. Result of the reviews, pros and cons of the framework and how they might take the framework forward.

References

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