Purposes, Practices and Standards in Tertiary Assessment: the student view

Helen Anderson, Mike Lopez
Denise Clarkson, Willem Fourie
Moses Faleolo
Introduction–Themes

- SURVEY: Conceptions of Assessment
  - Themes for exploration
- Purposes of Assessment
- Assessment Practices
- Standards and Diversity
Introduction–Subjects

- Health Studies
- Foundation Studies
- Social Work
- Information Technology
Method

- Focus Groups (4)
- Analysis of Transcripts
- Student voice as data
- The number becomes a varied landscape
Themes

- Purposes of Assessment
  - Assessment Practices
  - Standards and Diversity
Findings: Purposes of Assessment

- Staff
- Students
- General
The participants identified three main purposes for academic staff:

- **Measurement and accreditation**
- **Informing lecturers about students**
- **Helping lecturers reflect on their effectiveness.**

“...it also measures the amount of knowledge learned and y'know, gives the lecturer more information about the students' academic levels. And it's very important for the student because if you don't pass, well, you know what happens. We F-A-I-L.”

(FS Stud. 5)
The participants identified three main purposes for academic staff:

- **Measurement and accreditation**
- **Informing lecturers about students**
- **Helping lecturers reflect on their effectiveness**.

“...And for teachers, actually, they can -, from that assessment, they actually know what our strengths are.”

*(BASW Stud 6 p 9)*
The participants identified three main purposes for academic staff:

- **Measurement and accreditation**
- **Informing lecturers about students**
- **Helping lecturers reflect on their effectiveness.**

“And at the same time, it's for the lecturers as well, to see how well they teach us, if what they are teaching us is easy for us to learn.”

(BIS stud. 3)

“'Cause it gives, I mean, opportunity to evaluate whether what they are putting across is being understood.”

(Health stud. 1, p12)
Helping monitor learning progress

- Overall effort
- Effort applied strategically
- Self-efficacy

― “Cause you need to evaluate and see whether you need to work particularly harder - it's something you need to put in more effort”

(Health, stud 1, p 36).
Purposes for Students

Helping monitor learning progress

- Overall effort
- Effort applied strategically
- Self-efficacy

“Knowing where you're at. I think (LEARNING?) what your strengths and weaknesses are, where you're falling down on - perhaps that's where you get to pick up.”

(BASW Stud 1 p 9)
Helping monitor learning progress:

- Overall effort
- Effort applied strategically
- Self-efficacy

"When I get my results back, it's nice to know that, "Okay, I got that!" - ... so that you know that you're sort of going in the right direction,"

(BASW Stud 1 p 9)

It's like a booster, it gives me more confidence in the next assignment that may be more similar to that or not. Or even other assignments to come.

(BASW Stud 2 p 13)
A mark alone was not enough if feedback could be used to improve work, but only if it was timely. It was part of the contract between teacher and learner and could be positive or negative.

“I don't think anyone just looks solely at the mark, whether it be good or bad, without looking at the feedback.”

(BASW Stud 1 p 14).

“And when you're getting no comments, I mean, I just flick the papers into the drawer, leave them in the car - they are not important because there's no constructive criticism, there's nothing positive in them, it's simply just a mark.”

(BASW Stud 4 p 14).
A mark alone was not enough. Feedback was valued if it could be used to improve work... but only if it was timely. It was part of the contract between teacher and learner and could be positive or negative.

“So I knew in which areas I had to work on and that clarity, the explanation that I got about what was required of me in that assignment, then I knew how to tackle it better so that I can give the best possible answer.”

(Health, stud 1, p10).

“And I have to say that, honestly, the feedback was really good, okay. And when I first submit my first part of my assignment, the lecturer told me everything that I should be doing in order to improve the second part of the assignment.”

(BIS stud. 3).
**Purposes for Students**

- A mark alone was not enough
- Feedback was valued if it could be used to improve work ...
- ... but only if it was timely

.. if you get the feedback late, there isn’t much you can improve, do to improve on your next assignment – ‘cause we had a lot of that. Who were getting the feedback from one assessment when you have already handed in the next assignment. So how are you supposed to learn from”

*(Health, stud 1, p7)*
A mark alone was not enough
Feedback was valued if it could be used to improve work
... but
It was part of the contract between teacher and learner
and could be positive or negative

“Cause we put our korero into the paper, and our -, everything we have, so we would appreciate a little bit of the same.”
(BASW Stud 3 p 14).
A mark alone was not enough.
Feedback was valued if it could be used to improve work.
... but only if it was timely.
It was part of the contract between teacher and learner.

“If I get a couple of lines saying, "Good start", I'm like, okay. But if I get more than that, like explaining my strengths, my weaknesses, where I need some work on -, then even if my mark was bad then I'll be more than happy to take that feedback and then absorb it”

(BASW Stud 2 p 13)

“Whether it's the positive or negative feedback through your assessment, it gives you something to build on”

(BASW Stud 3 p 2)
Other purposes

Building capabilities that would help in the future
- Group work.
- Oral presentations
- Essays could improve writing skills.
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Themes

- Purposes of Assessment
- Assessment Practices
- Standards and Diversity
Findings: Practices

Positive Findings:

1. Students talked about the individual types of assessments they preferred:

   • “So I do better, yeah, I think, in essays and things and tests” (BASW stud 1, p2).

2. A few students recognized that a large range and variety of assessments for each subject was important for them:

   • “I like the variety of different ways we are assessed. Like we have group presentations, we have individual presentations, essays – there’s a wide range”.” (BASW Stud 1, p2).
3. Many of the students liked and preferred assessments and assessment practices that facilitated learning:

• “Like last semester, we did formative and then we had six tests. But this semester, we’ve got three formatives and five tests (Health, stud 1, p27). And do you like formatives? (Fac. 1). Yeah they’re good (Health, stud 1, p27)”

• “Instead of just y’know, havin a go and then submitting and then that final result - it doesn’t really help us y’know, if we can get a chance to resubmit, then I reckon, it’s not me just saying this just to make things easier for me, like making all subjects, topics easier. But it’s – I’ve found that it makes me learn more better” (BIS, stud 1).
Negative Findings:

1. Specific types of assessments:

   • “Yeah, speech – in a lecture room where you have to face lots of people” 
     (BIS, stud 2)

   • “I like the group work and the assignments a lot better than the tests” 
     (BASW, stud 4, p2)

2. The practice of late feedback and lecturers keeping test papers:

   • “Cause if you – like, and the other thing is if you get the feedback late, 
     there isn’t much you can improve, do to improve on your next 
     assignment – ‘cause we had a lot of that. Who were getting the 
     feedback from one assessment when you have already handed in the 
     next assignment. So how are you supposed to learn from” 
     (Health, stud 1, p7)
3. Inconsistencies of practices the students disliked:

• Different lecturers marking the same assessment:

“You get one lecturer who’s like a really lenient marker, you get another lecturer who’s like a really hard marker” (BASW, stud 2, p7)

• When one form of assessment was worth the majority of marks and similarly when large amounts of work were involved for a small percentage of marks:

“…….a total marks of seventy percent – on something which is really essay-type but, y’know, if you fail that, that’s it for that paper. Because seventy percent is a lot of marks.” (BASW, stud 6, p8)
• The wording of assessments:
  
  · “Not necessarily, just, at least the question should be clear enough so that anybody reading it will have the same understanding because, as she was saying. She’ll have a different understanding of what the media assignment was all about it. And I’ll have my own perspective. And yet we’re all supposed to write and present” (Health, stud 1, p32)

• Assessments being due at the same time:

  “They come, like literally one on top of the other within quite a small timeframe.” (BASW, stud 1, p3)

• Group assessments:

  “there were six in our group and it ended on the day of doing our presentation there was only two of us that did it………………….it ends up that if they don’t follow up and put the input, then I get caught for it. And yet I’m the one who actually did quite a lot of work. And I feel that’s not fair. That if they don’t do it, they shouldn’t get no marks and it shouldn’t affect me at all. But it has brought some of my grades down, as well.” (F Ed, stud 5)
Major issues with assessment practices:

- **Early feedback:**
  
  “If you get the feedback late, there isn’t much you can improve, do to improve on your next assignment — ‘cause we had a lot of that. Who were getting the feedback from one assessment when you have already handed in the next assignment. So how are your supposed to learn?” (Health, stud 1, p7)

- **Resubmission of assessments:**
  
  ”I’d just like to reiterate that the fact that our system (Indistinct), (Indistinct) chance (two or three?) to resubmit our papers” (BIS, stud 3)
Themes

- Purposes of Assessment
- Assessment Practices

Standards and Diversity
Findings: Standards and Diversity

- Quality and equity
- Cultural difference
- Diversity in previous learning experience
Findings: Standards and Diversity: Quality and equity

- Students took a strategic approach:
  - Identify the marker
  - Work according to perceived expectations
  - Consider the marker’s world view and passions
  - Consider the marker’s teaching style

“Yeah, you do pick up on, I think, whoever's marking's world-view and what you know to be their world-view and the way –, what they're passionate about, what they're teaching, yeah, in the lecture.” (BASW Stud 3 p 6)
Findings: Standards and Diversity: Quality and equity

- Equity – perception of fairness in assessments
- A certain standard – the same for all
- English as second language – must meet the required standard.

“We all come from our different walks of life. I think there does need to be some sort of standards so that everyone's getting –. At the end of this, we're all gonna end up – hopefully, touch wood – with that same piece of paper, that degree, and there has to be some sort of basic consistency right the way across the board.”

(BASW Stud 1 p 18)
Findings: Standards and Diversity: Cultural difference

- Assessments should take into account the diversity in worldviews and culture
- Markers should take into account the differing worldviews when marking
- Markers should acknowledge that they do not necessarily understand the beliefs and values of their students

“I wasn't very happy with what I got because it was a presentation on beliefs and values – who are you to judge my beliefs and values? You've only known me for like, probably two or three months, compared to the last twenty-five years of my life.” (BASW Stud 2 p 7)
Findings: Standards and Diversity: Cultural difference

- Even in the absence of cultural diversity, participants felt that everyone comes from a different experience.
- Despite diversity, students should try and adapt to the different environment.

"I mean, it depends on the person. Like if you want to change then you try and make an effort to change. So I think we should try and adapt to learning something different."

(Health, stud 2, p 29)
Findings: Standards and Diversity: 

Diversity in previous learning experience

- Participants emphasised the importance of clear and effective communication between lecturers and students.
- A lack in communication did not imply stupidity on the part of students who are culturally different to the lecturers.
- Recognition that expectations were very different to own educational experiences.

  "But when I came here, I looked at the marking criteria, I was like, "We're lucky we get the marking criteria". Back home we don't get that, you have to find your way around" (Health Stud 2).
Findings: Subjects/disciplines

- A tentative thought
  - Interaction between assessments and the skills/knowledge fostered in the curriculum
  - The discourse of the discipline reflected in the discourse on assessment
  - Implications for validity
In conclusion

A taste of the multiple layers of student thinking about assessment

- Scepticism about assessment?

- Qualitative method surfaced more engagement with the concept of assessment for learning than anticipated
Questions

- helen.anderson@manukau.ac.nz