Symposium on Tertiary Assessment and Higher Education Student Outcomes: Policy, Practice, and Research
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Roundtable Discussion:

Topic: What is culturally appropriate assessment?

Presenters: Moses Faleolo, Jim Clarke and John Milne

Correspondence: moses.faleolo@manukau.ac.nz
Today, the degree to which such processes (education) influence the way we think and learn largely depends on our ability to clarify for ourselves the differences between our received wisdom (from our formal, mainly western education) and the wisdom of the (home) cultures in which we grew up and were socialised, and from which we continue to learn important knowledge, skills and values.

In the context of formal education, the difference between these two sources is the “cultural gap”, which is small for those students whose home cultures are attuned to the culture of formal education but wide for those whose home culture is different.

(Professor Konai Helu-Thaman, 2001: 1)
Purpose and Aim

**Purpose:** To find out what culturally appropriate assessment is and how it impacts on assessment practices.

**Aim:** To ask Pasifika students what they thought and how as educators we learn from their experiences.
Background

• Bachelor of Applied Social Work (bicultural) degree program

• Three sequential years: “The Self” (Year 1); “The Practitioner” (Year 2); and “The Professional” (Year 3)

• Blended delivery/ lectures: less on theory, more on practice

• Achievements-based (Year 1) and Competency-based (Year 2 & 3)
Research Methodology

2 Stages: piloted at Whatapaka Marae (April, 2008); live at MIT (August, 2008)

Selection criteria: Pasifika (NZ or Island-born); first year degree study; voluntary

Focus group/ semi-structured interviewing schedule/ independent facilitator

Independent transcriber/ Triage analytical framework/ thematic

Findings triangulated/ sections built in the article per researcher
Focus group interview schedule

1. What assessment practices have you experienced? Follow up questions - What did you like? What did you like dislike?

2. What is the purpose of assessment for students? for lecturers? for MIT? Follow up questions – What are some examples?

3. What kinds of feedback have you experienced on your assessments? Follow up questions – What do you find useful? Why?

4. Should an assessment event be the same for everyone? Follow up questions – What might be reasons for variation? What might those variations be?

5. What is a culturally appropriate assessment for Pasifika students?
Findings

1. What assessment practices have you experienced? What did you like or dislike?
   - Participants were already experienced (first semester)
   - Liked: oral group presentations, essays, reflective journals, lecturer support

2. What is the purpose of assessment for students? for lecturers? for MIT? What are some examples?
   - Mostly for the students e.g. time management, direction or focus, monitoring their progress, and address ‘gaps’ in learning

3. What kinds of feedback have you experienced on your assessments? What do you find useful? Why?
   - Highly valued the feedback they received on their assessments – detailed, not just “ticks” and one liners
   - Temper verbal feedback for class and use written feedback for one-to-one
Findings

4. Should an assessment event be the same for everyone? What might be reasons for variation? What might those variations be?
   - Most said should be different in terms of its design and practicality e.g. language of questions, “weaving” to integrate Pasifika values and beliefs, “real” assessments not just essays but writing reports & submissions, and use of “personal communications” as a reference rather than just academic texts

5. What is a culturally appropriate assessment for Pasifika students?
   - Information about this topic limited. Participants defined the terms ‘culture’ and ‘appropriateness’, as to what these terms mean and then applied it to their own experiences of working with assessment. E.g. Samoan learners like group work because this being Samoan (collaboration) as opposed to essays because this is not being Samoan (individualistic).
Summary

• Culturally appropriate assessment vs. cultural valid assessment

• Assessment is a learning tool for staff and students

• Inclusive assessment design is essential

• Check with your students
Bibliography


