Assessing hard-to-measure learning: affective attributes at all levels of tertiary education

For Discussion
- Undergraduate external assessment/moderation processes
- Teaching portfolios for probation and promotion of academic staff
- Processes to short-list and to select academic staff for appointment

Introduction
- Intended learning outcomes, and graduate attributes, in undergraduate degrees
- Getting to grips with the difficult to measure
- Construct-referenced PhD assessment
- Peer review of published research papers and of grant applications

This paper will examine a very broad range of processes in higher education that could be described as assessment, even if generally they have other labels. The paper will describe the practices of (and attempt to compare the educational theories that underpin): the use of intended learning outcomes, and graduate attributes, in undergraduate degrees; construct-referenced PhD assessment; peer review of published research papers; processes to short-list and to select students and academic staff for admission or appointment; the use of teaching portfolios for probation and promotion of academic staff; and undergraduate external assessment processes. The paper will attempt to explain variation in the readiness of assessors to look for, and at, affective attributes of values, attitudes and dispositions, and identify opportunities for assessment practices in one area to enrich those in others. The paper seeks to establish common elements of assessment in the different regimes and will encourage discussion on overlaps between conventional assessment- and evaluation-paradigms.
• **Criterion-referenced assessment**
  Intended Learning Outcome, verbs, Constructive alignment, Assessment, Assessment criteria, Grade, Student-centred teaching.

• **Graduate Attributes**
  Graduates of *** will possess the following attributes: ethical behaviour towards others; readiness to participate in and ambition to lead regional and global societies, in both professional and personal roles.

  Graduates of the *** will hold personal values and beliefs consistent with their role as responsible members of local, national, international and professional communities. (E.g. Protect the natural environment, maintain biodiversity and conserve endangered species).

• **Programme Specifications**

• **Subject Benchmarks**

• For things affective, turn back to Bloom et al…. Focus on evaluation
.... variation in the readiness of assessors to look for, and at, affective attributes of values, attitudes and dispositions, and identify opportunities for assessment practices in one area to enrich those in others.
Getting a PhD

• Burnham (1994), the PhD viva is “one of the best kept secrets in British higher education” (p. 30).

• Tinkler and Jackson (2000) "The one specification common to all universities was that the candidate’s work must provide an original contribution to knowledge to be worthy of the award of PhD. Perhaps surprisingly, this was the only requirement that was common to all universities." (p169).

• Trafford (2003) Members of the PhD community act as examiners and see their role as ‘defending doctorateness’.

• Wiliam (2008) ... members of a community socially construct what it is to be a member of that community.

• Mullins and Kiley 2002 ....examiners look in the thesis for: critical analysis and argument; confidence and a self-critical approach; contribution to knowledge; originality, creativity and a degree of risk taking; sound methodology......

• ....trust, sharing, community, judgement … Clear interest in affective attributes of the candidate.
".... it is intention that BJET reports of experimental work should be analytical, not merely descriptive; reviews of developing fields should be critical, not merely informative; theoretical overviews should contain some original contribution or novel perspective. Ideally an article would also be well written, clearly structured, novel, well supported and of importance and interest to a majority of our readers. Clearly that's a tall order, and some flexibility may be needed, especially if the article has some redeeming qualities of a different kind." (Personal Communication BJET Editor, November 2008).

...trust, sharing, community, judgement, interest in unspecified qualities.
Getting a job

- Job description, person specification, application form, deadline, references, shortlist, interview, negotiation, job offer, contract, acceptance.
- Short-listing against criteria but 'reading between the lines'.
- Interview process; tell us about yourself.
- Open engagement with affective attributes... creativity, openness, honesty, responsiveness, enthusiasm, teamwork, best fit to other colleagues, values and attitudes... focus on judgement.
- Strict legal framework, accountability, litigation. (Will we soon see HR consultants in undergraduate examiners' meetings?).
Getting promoted

• Many Universities have strict criteria for academic promotion. ... Peers assess applicants' applications against these criteria.

• Professional Standards Framework “a means of demonstrating to students and other stakeholders the professionalism that staff bring to the support of the student learning experience”

• How the indicated values inform the practitioner’s work.

• Open engagement with affective attributes....respect for, commitment to, acknowledging... with an expectation of evidence of an individual's values in action (behaviours?).
External Assessment

• …oversight on the assessment process … moderation.

• …. evaluation rather than assessment.

• …. negotiation is a key feature of their operation,

• External assessors may demonstrate open engagement with affective attributes …. and comment on departmental fairness, commitment, openness, honesty, responsiveness, enthusiasm, teamwork and professionalism. All within an authority based on negotiation.
Conclusions and discussion?

• Undergraduate teaching does address the affective, but maybe is not so open about assessing it.

• After graduation, tertiary education embraces assessment of affective attributes, in the PhD, peer review of papers and grants, recruitment and promotion.

• Assessors judge creativity, openness, willingness, responsiveness, confidence, enthusiasm….

• Is it fair to ‘avoid’ assessing affective attributes in undergraduate education, as post-graduation, their affective attributes will be assessed?

• What can we learn from assessment post-graduation, to apply in undergraduate teaching? Portfolio; students demonstrate how values underpin their work. Judgement; by panels rather than by individuals. Negotiation; as an element of cohort evaluation. Are ILO’s deceptively simplistic?