This month I’ve had a request for material on assessment for first year students. The resource described below is another from the list of useful publications available through Leeds Metropolitan University in the UK.


“Would you be excited by the prospect of your assessment if you were a student” (p.14) is one of the questions included in this succinct (20 page) assessment guide.

The booklet begins by arguing that the curriculum is a key mechanism for addressing the challenges students face in their first year at university and for enhancing the first-year experience.

It proposes a focus on Feelings, Fit, Formative Activity and Fun (Fe Fi Fo Fun) in designing first-year assessment and feedback and elaborates on this approach by providing examples of very practical activities in ten sections organised using the “FIRST LEVEL” acronym:

- F – Friendships
- I – Interaction and dialogue
- R - Reflection and building on feedback
- S - Self-belief
- T - Teaching shaped by assessment
- L - Lifelong learning skills
- E - Efficient, value-added marking
- V - Valued diversity reflected through choice
- E - Engaging and enjoyable learning experiences
- L - Learning through experimentation

Each of the ten sections provides (i) general advice in an introductory section, (ii) a question, and (iii) some practical examples.

The extract below from the “E - Engaging and enjoyable learning experiences” section (p.14) illustrates the type of material included.

(i) **Introductory advice**

“8. Efficient, value-added marking: Designing assessments that are non-onerous to mark and manage – making assessment more fun for staff! – and that have a positive impact on learning

Summative assessment is concerned with making judgements in its role as assessment of learning, rather than formative in its role as assessment for learning. The requirements of summative assessment strongly influence where students concentrate their effort and
where we as staff spend most of our time evaluating their performance. We need to ask ourselves if the time we spend marking students’ first-year work contributes to their learning. Perhaps alternatively it would be better to reduce summative assessment and concentrate our efforts on providing formative opportunities for students?

(ii) Question
Does summative assessment actively engage your students with feedback, encourage them to learn to evaluate their own work and support each other’s learning?

(iii) Practical examples
36. Design assessments that are not too onerous to mark. Word length is not a proxy for quality. Shorter assignments may actually be more challenging for students while reducing staff workload. For example, a 500-word critique may be more demanding than a 5,000-word essay.

37. Consider the advantages of computer-aided assessment and technology to reduce the amount of time you spend marking.

38. Design your assessments so that tasks are aligned to both the learning outcomes and the content of the module and so that students have opportunities to practise before their work is marked.

39. Give students small, regular summative tasks at the beginning of a module that carry few marks but involve regular feedback. Increase marks towards the end of the module once students have had the chance to practise.

40. Consider involving other people in assessment, e.g. clients and other external stakeholders.”

Altogether this booklet contains 50 practical examples, a self-assessment grid for tutors working with first year students (pp. 16 – 19) and some references for further reading (p. 21).

Good advice on assessment for any particular group – first-years, international students, at-risk students and so on – is generally good advice on assessment for all student groups and many academics will find that this booklet contains many ideas that they can implement in designing assessment for students other than those in their first year at university.

This series of briefs on assessment topics has been prepared by the UQ Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI) for UQ teaching academics. “UQ ASSESSMENT BRIEFS” of journal articles, book chapters, reviews, websites, reports etc are distributed to Faculty and School Teaching and Learning Chairs in a form designed to encourage wider distribution.

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