Introduction

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CETL) based in Northumbria, UK, has a focus on Assessment for Learning (AfL). The CETL team’s experience and research led them to synthesise six key conditions for the support of AfL through a learning environment that:

- emphasises authenticity and complexity in the content and methods of assessment rather than reproduction of knowledge and reductive measurement
- uses high-stakes summative assessment rigorously but sparingly rather than as the main driver for learning
- offers students extensive opportunities to engage in the kinds of tasks that develop and demonstrate their learning, thus building their confidence and capabilities before they are summatively assessed
- is rich in feedback derived from formal mechanisms e.g. tutor comments on assignments, student self-review logs
- is rich in informal feedback e.g. peer review of draft writing, collaborative project work, which provides students with a continuous flow of feedback on ‘how they are doing’
- develops students’ abilities to direct their own learning, evaluate their own progress and attainments and support the learning of others (p. 2)

This paper provides some examples from practice that illustrate ways of addressing the six conditions and which support AfL.

AfL in Action

The paper then summarises 16 examples of assessment for learning practice from a range of disciplines and relate each to one or more of the six conditions listed above. Though the examples are attributed to specific disciplines, most are generic in that they can be applied across a range of fields and programs. The disciplines include engineering, literary theory, humanities honours, popular writing, childhood studies, history, psychology, education, art history and English.
Examples
The level of detail and the referencing for each section is illustrated in the following examples from Engineering and Psychology

Engineering
During the semester, students undertake lab-based and professional practice tasks. During each session formative discussion takes place on how these tasks directly support their achievement of the module learning goals. Students were asked to write these up based in a reflective manner hence integrating PDP2 concepts within the module to stimulate student reflection and self-management of their learning.

Summative assessment takes the form of a ten-minute individual oral exam, presented in the form of problem-solving exercise which could have referred to any of single task exercises undertaken during the module. This approach has resulted in students focussing on genuine learning rather than leaving work until revision time for exams.

This example:
• emphasises authenticity and complexity in the content and methods of assessment rather than reproduction of knowledge and reductive measurement.
• uses high-stakes summative assessment rigorously but sparingly rather than as the main driver for learning.
• offers students extensive opportunities to engage in the kinds of tasks that develop and demonstrate their learning, thus building their confidence and capabilities before they are summatively assessed.
• is rich in feedback derived from formal mechanisms e.g. tutor comments on assignments, student self-review logs.
• develops students’ abilities to direct their own learning, evaluate their own progress and attainments and support the learning of others.

i.e. Conditions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 (pp. 2,3)

Psychology
Check box feedback is often recommended as giving precise and clear information to students and was therefore adopted for feedback on Psychology practical reports. The programme team’s evaluation found that their students had difficulties in using this kind of feedback. Students were unable to recognise the problems identified and did not know how to improve their work. The teaching team now begin by asking first year students to write only parts of practical reports, with more frequent submission and more detailed feedback. At a later stage, when students are writing full reports, they are given a structured booklet with examples of frequently occurring errors and weaknesses to avoid. Students now find the feedback more helpful.

This example:
• offers students extensive opportunities to engage in the kinds of tasks that develop and demonstrate their learning, thus building their confidence and capabilities before they are summatively assessed.
• is rich in feedback derived from formal mechanisms e.g. tutor comments on assignments, student self-review logs.
• develops students’ abilities to direct their own learning, evaluate their own progress and attainments and support the learning of others.

i.e. Conditions: 3, 4 and 6 (page 6)
Conclusion
The paper concludes that we need assessment to work smarter and that it is “only by further development of the ways that staff and students approach assessment that we will be able to realise its full potential to support student progress and their development as autonomous learners” (p. 11).

References
The paper provides 6 references.

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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