‘STANDARDS’ AND ‘MARKING CRITERIA’: HONEST ATTEMPTS AT IMPOSSIBLE TASKS?

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‘Accountability’ and ‘measurability’

• Increasing demand to articulate explicitly the standards of assessment and to make them transparent in an analytical marking scheme
  – Growing expectation of public accountability
  – Ideas of good educational practice
• Increase the transparency and reliability of assessment

• Foster autonomy and self-regulation in students

• Make marking easier for markers (?!)

Marking schemes make ‘criteria’ and ‘standards’ accessible to all

• If criteria are explicitly stated and standards clearly described → they become automatically accessible to all: assessors, learners, and any other third party

???

• Objection → Satisfactory justification of a mark does not come from a marking scheme but comes when the student accepts the justification provided by the rubric (Gottlieb & Moroye, 2016)
Is the climate changing?

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Framework for Transforming Assessment in HE (HEA 2016)
(In order) to share standards in higher education, there has been an overemphasis on detailing criteria and levels. Using explicit criteria cannot capture all the different aspects of quality. Limits to the extent that standards can be articulated explicitly must be recognised.

A Marked Improvement. Transforming assessment in HE (HEA 2012)
The assessment of ‘complex performance’

- Rubrics are not useful for measuring and evaluating complex performances and skills

- Unpredictable variety of ‘responses’
  - Considering more qualitative aspects does not solve the problem (Sadler, 2013; Bloxam, 2013)

- Analytic rubrics imply a steady increase in skills and fail to acknowledge the role of setbacks in learning → They foster a mistaken idea of learning and create wrong expectations in students

- Promote a false sense of objectivity in marking and grading
Measurement on a linear scale

Basic principle

Equal numerical increments correspond to equal increments on the underlying elements
Grammatically almost flawless.  
A wide range of general and topic specific vocabulary.  
Fluent throughout.  
Very good pronunciation and intonation.

Good level of grammatical accuracy throughout.  
A good range of general and topic specific vocabulary.  
Fluent throughout.  
With occasional hesitation searching for vocabulary and phrases.

Several grammatical errors.  
Sufficient general vocabulary; some use of topic specific vocabulary.  
Generally fluent; some hesitation searching for vocabulary and phrases.  
Slow delivery; frequent hesitation searching for vocabulary and phrases.

Frequent errors in basic grammatical patterns.  
Adequate general vocabulary; little use of topic specific vocabulary.  
Slow delivery; frequent hesitation searching for vocabulary and phrases.  
Very hesitant and slow delivery.

An excessive number of basic grammatical errors which impede understanding.  
Language often inappropriate, basic lexis frequently unknown.  
Slow delivery; frequent hesitation searching for vocabulary and phrases.  
Very hesitant and slow delivery.

Quantitative specifiers: excellent, good, moderate, marginal, thorough, limited, adequate, weak, poor, lacking

Modifiers: generally, very, mostly, some, often, markedly, virtually

(Sadler, 2013)
Grading is judgement not measurement’
(Yorke, 2011)

• Grading complex performance requires professional judgements more than measurement

• Grading decisions are holistic

• Assessors work backwards
  – holistic judgement → awarding of marks to criteria = justified grade decision
    (Bloxham, Boyd & Orr, 2011; Brooks, 2012)

• Difficulty of transferring the tacit knowledge of the standards outside a concrete context of students’ work
Using exemplars

- Criteria and standards can be better communicated by discussing exemplars
- Exemplars provide samples of assessment standards in practice
- Rubrics on their own cannot deliver what they promise
O’Donovan, Price & Rust, 2004
The UoR Curriculum Framework

Assessment is for learning

Balance between formative and summative assessment

Formative assessment prepares well for summative assessment

Feedback → feeds forward

It is regular, accessible, thorough, and timely
The task of teachers is not to provide judgements about quality and advice on how to improve them. It is to teach students how to judge quality and modify their own work during production (Sadler, 2013: 55)
We need to be pragmatic and try to find a balance between different purposes of assessment and possibly reconcile the contradictory effects of these different purposes (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007: 45)
References


