



Position Statement for Higher Education Academy Panel: Student input to assessment design & strategy

Student involvement - cheap labour or learning partnerships?

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When we introduced peer assisted learning in the Business School in the early nineties several of my colleagues thought it was just cheap (slave?) labour. Thankfully that view has changed as they have worked with the students. We have learnt that we must treat students as partners in the learning and assessment process not as cheap labour or customers if we care about learning.

It is relatively easy to trace the early history of student involvement in the processes of assessment and feedback and, for most of it, their involvement has been in passive mode. Traditionally students were just expected to undertake their assessment (usually exams) without much guidance and, perhaps, receive feedback on how well they had done. With the advent of the stakeholder society and a focus on quality standards there was a drive to make assessment standards far more transparent to all stakeholders, in particular students. Learning outcomes, grade descriptors and assessment criteria were born, setting out the aims and standards students must work towards. Unfortunately passive engagement (if that is not an oxymoron) seems to be ineffective, students were not any the wiser about the standards of work we expect from them (Price and Rust 1999)

Work undertaken at Oxford Brookes seemed to suggest that if students are actively engaged in the processes of assessment and feedback their understanding of assessment standards greatly improves. This is being reinforced by findings from our FDTL (Fund for Development of Learning and Teaching) project, Engaging Students with Assessment Feedback - What Works?¹ That improved understanding, unsurprisingly, also improves their performance in assessment (Rust et al 2003). Bringing students into our world of assessment and feedback enables them to better internalise the assessment standards we use when assessing work. Communicating those standards is a complex process and involves the transfer of tacit as well as explicit knowledge. This is most effectively achieved through example, observation and imitation, all of which take place within a community of practice. Our Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, ASKe (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange)², is focusing on ways in which we can cultivate community among students and staff in order to facilitate understanding of assessment standards. Inevitably this means students must be active participants in their own assessment and feedback processes and we are developing a range of ways of involving students, some directly related to communicating assessment standards others about creating community. These include using peer review and assessment, providing feedback for dialogue, peer assisted learning scheme, employing

¹ <http://www.business.brookes.ac.uk/learningandteaching/engstudsassfeedbkindex.html>

² <http://www.business.brookes.ac.uk/learningandteaching/aske/about.html>



students as module assistants on very large modules, supporting students to organise social events, providing social networking software.

So what is stopping you - your colleagues accusing you of undermining their jobs and reducing their marking loads; challenging the traditional roles of staff and students; not trusting students to get it right (they need your guidance and support)? Why you should - improve student performance; learner development; building student confidence; student enthusiasm; better information on the student perspectives; creative ideas from students.

REFERENCES

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