Assessment: from fairness to authenticity

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Aims of the session

- Understand NUS’ previous work on feedback and national trends regarding assessment
- Understand the current debates on assessment in the academic literature
- Discuss interventions that could improve the authenticity of assessment
Why feedback and assessment?

National Student Survey (% agree)

- The teaching on my course
- Assessment and feedback
- Academic support
- Organisation and management
- Learning resources
- Personal development
- Overall satisfaction
- SU

[Graph showing trends from 2009 to 2013 for various aspects of student survey, indicating an overall increase in satisfaction across the years.]
What has NUS done so far?

- Topic of debate since 2005
- 2008: Great NUS Feedback Amnesty
- Ten Principles of Effective Feedback
- 2009: Exam feedback sticker campaign
- 2010: Assessment feedback form
- 2012: Relaunched Feedback Amnesty
- 2013: Benchmarking tool
Who’s affected?

Assessment and feedback (% satisfaction)
What aspect of assessment?
Current debates in the academic literature
Feedback as a part of learning

- Previous campaigns have often focused on processes rather than educational outcome.
- Move from universities as the “gatekeepers” of knowledge and the only providers of feedback to a more dialogic approach.
- As well as providing feedback, academics need to facilitate students’ use of feedback as part of learning.
- Self-reflection may not come naturally and may need to be explicitly facilitated.
- Feedback is not an end goal, but an ongoing developmental conversation.
Communities of practice

• Separate communities of practice exist between staff and students and they communicate in different languages
• Conversations need to happen between staff and students to ensure a shared understanding of the assessment criteria
• Tutors perceive their feedback to be more detailed and useful than students do
• Students may misunderstand the intention of tutor feedback, and read it selectively or apply it wrongly
Authentic assessment

- A concept born from the narratives of student engagement, education as transformation and employability
- The notion that all assessments should relate to the “real world”, rather than be tasks that are removed from any context where the learning might be used in the future
- “Assignments or assessment tasks that call upon students to construct their own meaning or knowledge through in-depth disciplined inquiry”
“Unlike conventional paper-and-pencil tests that focus on knowledge reproduction and low-level cognitive processing skills in artificial, contrived contexts, authentic assessment tasks underscore knowledge construction, complex thinking, elaborated communication, collaboration and problem solving in authentic contexts.”

May 2012, Volume 24, Issue 2, pp 135-149
Four aspects of authenticity

1. Problems rooted in the real world
2. Learning through inquiry and thinking skills – metacognition (thinking about your thinking)
3. Discourse among a community of learners, cooperative and peer learning
4. Empowered through authentic learning – personal connection, student centred learning

Why authenticity?

“The higher the level of authentic learning that focuses on higher levels of thinking, disciplined in-depth inquiry, substantive discourse, and connections to the real world, the higher the level of all students’ performance regardless of achievement level or demographic characteristics”

Discussion in groups

1. What is/are the purpose/s of summative assessment?
2. Who should decide what is authentic? Authentic to whom?
3. Does using authentic assessment necessarily mean that outcomes are directly related to employment? Should it be?
What can you do to improve assessment authenticity at your institution?

What could NUS do to support you?
Key points

• Feedback and assessment have been issues for students for many years
• We’re bringing the campaign away from focusing on process to being more integrated into broader work about how students learn
• Much of the academic literature focuses on feedback as a part of learning, developing communities of practice and authenticity
• Authenticity (real world problem solving, learning by inquiry and through discourse, empowering learners to have a personal stake) has been proven to improve learning outcomes
• Authenticity is particularly timely given the current emphasis on student engagement and partnership
More information


Benchmarking tool: [http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resourcehandler/a8b81c81-3e09-4798-bb38-b19d20d77c04/](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resourcehandler/a8b81c81-3e09-4798-bb38-b19d20d77c04/)
