

## **Changing assessment: shifting the emphasis to learning and use**

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During the past decade the goals and emphasis of student assessment in higher education have been questioned as never before. The certainties about what assessment is for and how it should operate are being challenged. A norm-referenced approach has been displaced by one based on standards. The overwhelming dominance of grading and certification is being replaced by a view that gives at least as much emphasis to learning and how assessment should foster it (Boud & Falchikov, 2007).

A new agenda is emerging that frames assessment not as looking back in terms of knowledge and skills acquired, but as making a contribution to future learning and practice through the calibration of student judgement. The new agenda is based on the following assumptions about assessment processes:

- they contribute positively to students' learning,
- they take a view of what is to be learned and how it is to be learned beyond the current course unit,
- they develop students ability to make judgements about what constitutes good work,
- they position students as active learners, and
- they engage students in the process of seeing themselves as people who will contribute to practice, whatever that practice might be.

To pursue this agenda in higher education courses, there needs, as well as an emphasis on key concepts, to be a focus on rich, integrated assessment tasks that involve the linking of knowledge across the curriculum in the context of tasks akin to those used in practice. Some of the elements include:

- Actively engaging students in learning tasks
- Authentically oriented investigative activities
- Students designing assessments
- Integrative tasks
- Students becoming aware of the judgements they are making about their own work
- A focus on threshold concepts
- Modelling and practice
- Working with others in giving and receiving feedback (Boud & Molloy, 2013)

For examples of assessment tasks of different kinds in different disciplines, see the Assessment Futures website: <http://www.assessmentfutures.com>.

Boud, D. (2000). Sustainable assessment: rethinking assessment for the learning society. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 22, 2, 151-167.

Boud, D. & Molloy, E. (Eds) (2013). *Feedback in Higher and Professional Education*. London: Routledge.

Boud, D. & Falchikov, N. (Eds) (2007). *Rethinking Assessment for Higher Education: Learning for the Longer Term*. London: Routledge.