

Let's 'Face It': Striving for Fair, Accurate and Transparent Assessment

Karen Ford, University of Sheffield

A question we routinely receive regarding working with faculty on assignment design is how to get started. What if assignments have never been shared and faculty are reluctant to do so? What if there isn't safe space to talk about assignments? What if we can't start conversations with assignments and need another way in? Fortunately, Karen Ford from the University of Sheffield addresses these issues by providing a means to initiate conversations with faculty about assessment ranging from the value and purpose of learning outcomes, assessments, and rubrics to issues of assignment design. In her interactive presentation, "Let's Face It", Karen outlines a faculty development workshop that is backward designed to create a space to openly discuss issues of teaching, learning, and assignment design.

For more information, read the following abstract used at the Assessment of Higher Education Conference (2015, 2016) about the activity:

Achieving a wider and more deeply rooted transformation of assessment practices beyond the individual to departmental, faculty or institutional level is arguably dependent on the parties involved developing a shared understanding of the challenges and practicalities associated with striving for (and hopefully achieving) more valid, reliable, aligned and transparent assessment to support learning. This presentation outlines a simple and unassuming approach that has been used to promote assessment literacy among a range of staff with assessment responsibilities (interestingly, the literacy assessment literature appears to focus primarily on student literacy e.g. see Deeley & Bovill, 2015). By undertaking a short fictitious marking activity, participants gain a shared marking experience which provides a mechanism for enabling meaningful and productive discussion, and candid sharing of practice (both sound and problematic) beyond disciplinary and structural boundaries encouraging a trans-disciplinary approach (see McClam & Flores-Scott, 2012; Ji & Jeong, 2010). The marking activity has been designed for those with any level of experience and highlights the issues that arise when endeavouring to ensure valid and reliable assessment and the processes and strategies which can support this. These include standardising assessors to the criteria before assessment, approaches to moderation and mechanisms for promoting transparency to support learning, such as providing opportunities for students to get to grips with the criteria. University policies and guidelines are also presented and considered in light of the processes and strategies that participants identify as being part of their departmental practices (or not). Aspects of Constructive Alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011) in relation to assessment are also highlighted, in particular the crucial relationship among the intended learning outcomes, the assessment task (and brief) and associated assessment criteria. After participating in the activity, and the lively discussion and debates that typically follow, participants are encouraged to investigate their departmental practices in more detail and seek clarity where processes are unclear or implicit. While this is particularly important for those new to marking, more experienced participants with wider responsibilities have reported using the discussions for informing the development of assessment practices more widely in their department e.g. a consistent approach to standardisation across modules. This presentation will provide an outline of the scaffolded marking activity, the context in which it was developed and the design

rationale - an experiential approach to promoting assessment literacy among staff. Participant responses and feedback to date suggests this activity has the potential to provide a first step to transforming practice beyond the individual from the ground up. This begs the question: could this rather simple trans-disciplinary approach offer a transformational starting point by creating the space and opportunity for colleagues to reach the shared understandings on which a more deeply rooted transformation of assessment practices beyond the individual depends?