

## **ASSIGNMENT 1: ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING AND REFLECTION**

### **PART A:**

Assessment has many responsibilities, to the student, the school, the parents, the community, the society and, to the teacher. Each of these stakeholders takes something different from the assessment and the feedback given to the student's efforts. Because of this there are different types of assessment and different ways of displaying the results. There are a range of strategies for gathering this data on student's abilities, through tests, multiple choice, true-false etc., short answer questions, essays, reports, projects and portfolios (Brady & Kennedy, 2012, pp. 43-71). All have different marking methods and varying degrees of subjectivity and all have their place. The most important thing to recognise is that all of these have a direct impact on the student and their ability to continue learning (Kher, Juneau, & Molstad, 2002, p. 148).

Formative assessment and feedback can adversely effect students and how they learn. This is in relation to how feedback is structured (Kher, Juneau, & Molstad, 2002, pp. 148-149), when it is given (Shute, 2008, p. 163) and in what format (Bloom & Bourdon, 1980, pp. 13-14). There have been many studies on the most effective method of giving feedback, but as all students are different it is impossible to come up with a conclusive answer. However, it is clear that giving some form of feedback is vital.

With regards to the wider impact of assessment, students are ranked against other schools, or against each other, in the primary and middle years by NAPLAN and then for their end of school tertiary entrance ranking. These results are for the benefit of the wider community; it is a quick way of finding and analysing strengths and weaknesses in the national curriculum. But, unfortunately, it publicly displays the data so parents can compare schools. This is a narrow view of school performance but it adversely effects funding and school enrolments. The assessment of aptitude via these blanket tests does not consider the student's progress, effort or background. It also makes assessment into something that it should not be, the purpose of assessment is to 'improve learning, inform teaching, help students achieve the highest standards they can and provide meaningful reports on students' achievement.' (ACT Government et al., 2011, p. 6) This type of assessment does not allow for formative, directed, feedback to the students. Without feedback the students gain very little from this, they need feedback on how to improve (Shute, 2008, p. 157), so they can improve.

Since the national tests are mandatory it is for teachers to give effective feedback on other assessments so that they can use this to build on their experiences. The geography project by the year 8 female student, evaluated in this essay, is a good example of a student's work that can have formative, directed, feedback. She has created a Power Point presentation on the Kakadu National Park, and while it has many strengths, to get her to year 8 standard, per the Northern Territory curriculum

specifications (Northern Territory Government, 2012, p. 12), she will need to work on certain learning areas.

Her project is on 'Landforms and Landscapes' from Year 8 geography in the Australian Curriculum. This is a broad topic, and as the assessment task is a project it means that the students have a lot of information to process which can, and has in this instance, lead to misguided research and unsubstantiated claims. Brady and Kennedy (2012, p. 69) list the 'vague assessment criteria', 'projects losing their way through an overly ambitious choice of topic' and 'the tendency to focus on the cosmetic (pretty pictures) rather than the demonstration of substantive outcomes' as reasons for problems in project assessment tasks, this student has fallen into these traps.

To evaluate this assignment I have taken into account research information from a variety of academic sources relating to the impact and importance of feedback (Bloom & Bourdon, 1980) (Brady & Kennedy, 2012) (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) (Kher, Juneau, & Molstad, 2002) (Shute, 2008). I have used the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2014) as a benchmark for the content and the *Learning Area Achievement Standards for the Northern Territory* (Northern Territory Government, 2012) for the standards it should meet.

She has addressed the following parts of the curriculum with varying degrees of competence,

- The different types of landscapes and their distinctive landform features (ACHGK048)
- Protecting significant landscapes (ACHGK052)
- Human cause and effects of landscape degradation (ACHGK051)
- Collecting, recording, evaluating and representing (ACHGS056)
- Reflecting and responding (ACHGS062)

These are the general capabilities required of these syllabus points and how well she met them:

- **Literacy**

She displays competent literacy skills, with reasonably clear and thought out presentation. There are some issues with spelling and sentence structure, but I believe this is due to poor self-assessment (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, pp. 93-94), further to that some of the sentence structure reads as though the student speaks English as a second language.

- **Critical and creative thinking**

She uses geographically suggestive headings on her slides but does not address geographical issues, leaving out vital information relating to landforms, geological evolution, climate etc.

She critically analyses the management of the park with their culling and burn back procedures, and gives some proposals for sustainability.

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures**

She has addressed the history of the park very poorly. With out any relevant or accurate information.

She has used some uncited indigenous rock art paintings.

- **Sustainability/ Personal and social capability**

Through her research she has identified that the problems faced by the Kakadu National Park are mining, burning off and animal culling. While she has made recommendations she has not provided evidence to support these, therefore they are unqualified. She has a clear plan for the future of the park the supports environmentally friendly and inclusive community ideas.

The slide of the list of facilities at the Kakadu National Park and the slide of the History of the Park seem like the information was taken directly from the Kakadu National Park tourist information.

- **Ethical understanding**

She displays an ethical tone to her project, but it is perhaps too emotive and unfounded

- **Numeracy**

There is only the land mass provided of Kakadu National Park, but, she does not display numeracy skills in drawing links between the number and it's relevance

- **Intercultural understanding**

None presented.

*I have chosen to review the project following the general capabilities set by the Australian Curriculum, this is to ensure that my feedback is based on curriculum requirements and not on non related aspects, for example, spelling.*

At first this project it is well presented and the information is fair. However, on reflection with the standards set by the *Australian Curriculum* and the *Learning Area Achievement Standards for the Northern Territory* it does not draw on many of the required parts of the unit. Those that are, have not been attempted in a way that is relevant to the geography syllabus. It seems as though she has not filtered the information she found in her research.

With reference to the *Learning Area Achievement Standards for the Northern Territory* this project is just within the Year 7 requirements for geography with some sections not at Year 6 level. She does not analyse the information she has provided, rather proposes new points that require a fairly high level of understanding by the reader to interpret.

My concern about this assignment is that it does not seem to have much structure or direction, and stripped back does not contain much information. This could be a problem with the task that has been set; projects are hard to define (Brady & Kennedy, 2012, p. 69). The students might not have been given a clear understanding of the requirements of this project. I believe this student has the ability to improve, her project indicates that she is critical. She has demonstrated the ability to research and present information, she has interpreted some environmental

and economical challenges faced by the Kakadu National Park, and has given a clear proposal for what should be done to overcome these. It is because of this that my feedback is directed at the Where am I going? How am I going? and Where to next? process from 'The Power of Feedback' by John Hattie and Helen Timperley (2007, p. 86), I feel that she needs to refocus on the goals set by the teacher for this project, so she can then address how she is going to find out how to proceed with improvement.

This assessment piece is a demonstration of this student's ability *and* potential, so I want her to feel able to improve and correct errors so she is confident to address the next task. During the marking process of this project I have given ticks where the information is correct and critical, I have chosen to not say or demonstrate that anything is wrong. I have given suggestions for pages that are lacking information and relevance to try to make them relevant. I have used the method of 'corrective' feedback because, although the studies are inconclusive, the results indicate that this is the most effective for student engagement (Bloom & Bourdon, 1980, p. 13) & (Shute, 2008, p. 157). I have also used brief, specific and leading feedback to assist the student to make effective changes in the future (Shute, 2008, pp. 158-159). With reference to Hattie and Timperley's feedback process I have based my suggestions around the Australian Curriculum standards that she did not quite meet, the Where am I going?, I have proposed questions through out my evaluation to get her to answer, the How am I going? and finally, I have given her suggestions for improvements, for the Where to next?.

**PART B:**

I have found this assignment and topic interesting and challenging. While I think I knew that assessment was important I have enjoyed reading and learning about the impact of assessment. The topic has brought to my attention the theoretical side to assessment and this knowledge will be relevant when I am in school. Further to the topic, this assignment has reinforced to me the importance of knowing your curriculum, without that there can be no consistency.

When I first read the geography project I thought it was excellent, and I was amazed a Year 8 student was able to produce it. But as I started reading it along side the curriculum, both Australian and Northern Territory, I saw that there was a lot of room for improvement. I also found it useful to read the Year 8 work sample provided on the Australian Curriculum website, it was a good bench mark to compare and contrast the different students.

I have learnt that assessment of student's work is varied, ongoing and vital to a student's progression through school, and perhaps, if done effectively in life.

I would like to further investigate the politics associated with assessment. I feel unsure of my position with regards to national testing, I know it has a place, but I am concerned with the unforeseen repercussions of this, for example, the MySchool



website. I would like to look into old and international methods of similar data collection techniques. It would be interesting to see the social and educational impacts.

Q1: Are *students* adversely affected by NAPLAN? Is their curriculum interrupted to 'train' for testing?

Q2: Are *teachers* adversely affected by NAPLAN? Do they suffer from the results distribution?

## Reference List:

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