Using assessment to change student learning

A short introduction

Background

- **Students are widely expected to:**
  - ➢ **master complex subject material**
  - ➢ **develop many complex skills**
  - ➢ **reflect upon and judge their own achievements**
  - ➢ **develop confidence in themselves as independent, flexible and enquiring people**

What does assessment do?

- **Defines what students will concentrate upon**
- **Affects how they learn**
- **Specifies what counts as learning -- gives meaning to 'critical thinking', for example**
- **Provides information about shortfalls between performance and specification**
- **Stimulates conversations about, and reflection on, improvement**

Assessment is more than testing

> **See handout #1 on limits to summative assessment**

- **Summative assessment purposes**
  - **Grades**
  - **Reliability vital**
  - **Validity often compromised by need to simplify to make the assessment reliable**
  - **Little feedback, if any - especially on shortfall between performance and specifications**
- **Formative assessment purposes**
  - **'Conversations' to produce learning feedback**
  - **Validity**
  - **How important is reliability?**

Alternatives: 53 assessment methods

> **See handout #2 on alternative assessment methods**

- **Many methods**
- **Can assess in many ways**
- **Good assessment means using a range of assessment methods, i.e. to assess complex learning we need to use a good number of the 53 methods from handout 2**

Alternatives: Constructed response tasks (CRTs)

- **Constructed response tasks require students to create an answer (most tests expect them to identify the right answer)**

Advantages of CRTs

- **Access authentic thinking and performance**
- **Usually require more than one achievement or skill to be used/displayed**
- **More valid as indicators of complex learning achievements -- more authentic**
- **Potentially more interesting/rewarding than MCQs and response tasks: they can make 'human sense'**

Disadvantages with CRTs

- **Their complexity makes reliable grading hard and costly**
- **Their complexity can lead to student complaints of excessive challenge and workload**
  - ➢ **especially if hard-working students feel they are not getting marks that reward the amount of information they have**
- **They may not really be very valid**

Grading CRTs

- **Performance criteria (indicators are essential)**
  - ➤ **agreed solutions**
  - ➤ **notes of main points**
  - ➤ **item-specific criteria**
  - ➤ **generic grading indicators (see handout #3)**
- **Assessor training**
- **Consider marking parts (samples)**

Alternatives: assessment of authentic achievements

- **Often known as 'authentic assessment' (AA)**
- **N. American assessment practice often fails to assess the skills, understanding and qualities <u>really</u> involved in professional practices**
- **But, for AA to be reliable,**
  - **Good, valid criteria essential**
  - **Assessor training/monitoring vital**
  - **More than one assessor needed**
  - **Repeated, purposeful assessments**
  - **All this implies an assessment plan**

Alternatives: Assessing performances

A form of authentic assessment

- **Methods include:**
  - ➢ **Work placements**
  - ➢ **Simulations**
  - ➢ **Reports on problem-working inquiries**
  - ➢ **Portfolios (see below)**
  - ➢ **Case study work (analysing or constructing)**
  - ➢ **Exhibitions**
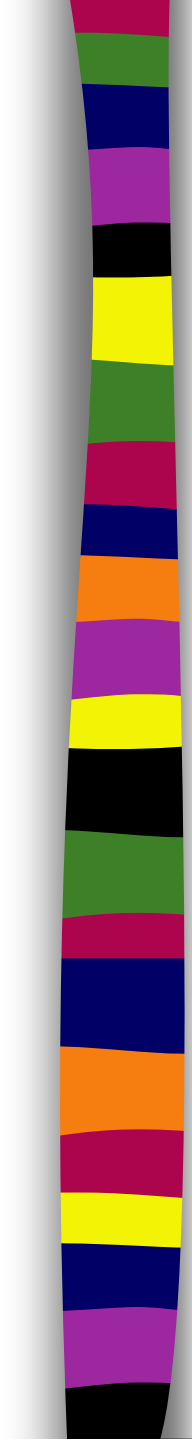 - ➢ **Problem-based learning (potentially)**

Guidelines for good assessment of performance

Apply guidelines for CRT & portfolio assessment

- *Plus* be sensitive to context
- *Plus* triangulate – get other data
- *Plus* judge extent of student understanding in other ways

Alternatives: Assessment by means of projects

- **A form of authentic assessment**
- **Make sure full guidelines on doing the project are given to students -- see handout #4.**
- **Follow guidelines on grading CRTs and portfolios**
- **Consider grading progress reports**
- **Consider two-step grading process. Completion of all sections is necessary but grades are then based on quality of key sections**

Alternatives: Assessment by means of portfolios

- **Handout #5** **What are portfolios?**
- **Handout #6** **A suggested portfolio structure**
- **Handout #7** **Criteria to guide portfolio-making**
- **Handout #8** **Making portfolios**

Grading portfolios faster

- **Sample within portfolios**
- **Concentrate on the first section**
- **Require portfolios to be submitted with a 1000 word analysis, appreciative or critical appraisal. Grade mainly on it**
- **Require students to submit self-assessment grids**
- **Grade on the basis of an examination of one complex question that can only be answered with reference to portfolios, which students bring into the examination room**

From summative to formative

- **Expense and difficulty – even impossibility – of reliable assessment of complex learning**
- **Formative assessment can be cheaper and more authentic**
- **Suggestion #1:**
  - ➢ **Identify what can be reliably and affordably assessed and invest in assessing it well**
  - ➢ **Use formative assessment for everything else**
- **Suggestion #2:**
  - ➢ **Make programme-wide assessment plans**