

STUDENT-DESIGNED RUBRICS FOR PURPOSEFUL ASSESSMENT

Rubrics are a valid form of assessment especially when students are actively engaged in designing their own rubrics for self-assessment. They can be a means in aiding students to construct their own learning pathways and to set meaningful and purposeful goals for future learning. Jennie Bales, ASLA Teacher Librarian of the Year 2006, offers some thoughts on student developed rubrics. A fuller paper can be accessed through conference proceedings of the **Visions of learning: ASLA online II.**

Formative assessment and the rubric

Authentic assessment is becoming increasingly recognised as an effective means to assess students' capabilities and understandings and provide different and significant information to add to a teacher's assessment toolkit. More traditional summative assessment, in the form of standardised and classroom-based testing, focuses on measuring what students recognize and recall, often with their knowledge being applied in isolation or out of context.

Formative assessment focuses on students using their knowledge to perform effectively, hence the assessment focuses on the ability to *apply* knowledge and skills rather than measure the actual knowledge and skills gained. From this perspective, authentic assessment supports current trends in Australian education of which the promotion of deep thinking and problem solving are foremost.

One strategy that supports authentic assessment and the development of deep thinking and problem solving is the rubric. A rubric is a type of scoring guide that identifies specific areas of performance and differentiates between levels of development in those performance areas.

Rubrics provide a formalised structure to *guide* subjective assessment as they provide a means to measure *gradual progress in students' learning*. Used as an authentic assessment tool for:

- evaluating student learning and attainment of outcomes, and
- identifying and clarifying specific performance expectations and providing attainment goals for student aspiration,

they should be clear, easy to use and understand. The included criteria need to align with identified goals.

Three areas of content need to be included in a rubric:

- outcomes or identified learning goals,
- rating range or scale and
- indicators of achievement as evidence.

Rose (2006-1995, para. 3) argues that rubrics can become powerful motivational tools when they are shared with students prior to commencing a project or assignment. Clarke (1998, p. 10) believes that sharing learning intentions with students ensures that every pupil is focused on the purpose of the task and that it encourages pupil involvement and comment on their own learning. Rubric assessments developed prior to, or in the early stages, of a learning task provide clearly articulated criteria for students to aspire to and work towards. As Clarke (1998, p.47) notes:

Without the 'secret' knowledge of the learning intention ... children have been deprived of information which will not only enable them to carry out the task more effectively, they have also been denied the opportunity to self-evaluate, communicate this to the teacher, set targets for themselves and get to understand their own learning needs: in other work words, to think intelligently about their own learning, rather than 'finding' out what the teacher wants, and doing it.

Self-evaluation

The importance of inviting children to create success criteria involves them still further in their own learning. They are being asked, effectively, to link the learning intention with the task instructions. They then have to decide how the two are synthesised to create success criteria – a much more

challenging learning experience than simply being given the information (Clarke 2001, p.22).

A further enabling action, building on from the clear articulation of learning goals in the rubric, is to ensure that not only do students have access to assessment information *early* in a project but also have the opportunity to self-evaluate their progress.

A highly effective strategy to ensure that students:

- a) understand the task
- b) understand the learning goals and
- c) understand the form of assessment and the language used

is for them to construct their own rubric for self-evaluation. If they know the purpose of the task, in terms of learning and how it will be carried out, they have a context for developing successful criteria.

Teacher librarians can be powerful partners in helping students to design their own rubrics. Through identifying criteria based on an information skills/research process, students can be encouraged to design a rating system based on levels of achievement.

For example, the students might complete one outcome by adding examples of evidence /indicators for 'Define the topic' (limit evidence/indicators to two or three examples). Experience has shown that students find it easier to start at the 'average' or 'satisfactory' level and then identify evidence above and below that standard.

A reflection

Educators need to be confident in their *own* design and application of rubrics as part of their assessment toolkit before embarking on a process that fully involves students at the construction stages. Students who have been exposed to rubrics generated by their class teachers will be better able to contextualise their understandings in the development of an assessment rubric. A collaborative approach ensures that all students have

an active part in their own assessment and are fully aware of the standards they need to work towards.

There are a number of quality websites that offer examples of rubrics to adapt in all curriculum areas as well as software that allows a teacher to input the information and then automatically generate a rubric.

The bibliography provides a starting point for further exploration of the use of rubrics as part of the student assessment.

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