

## **Abstract: Taking the Ass out of Assessment: Getting rid of the ‘Donkeywork’**

**Session description:** Much has been said about assessment, yet it seems to be one of the most persistent challenges in higher education. Student success, profiles of good degrees, retention statistics, student satisfaction, workload and timing are all aspects that we may, sometimes, feel ‘saddled with.’

The first part of the session will attempt to raise issues, provoke discussion, and to seek and share solutions related to our experiences of assessment ‘that works’. No matter how often you weigh the donkey, it won’t get fatter as a result, unless it is a nourishing process. If assessment doesn’t lead to enhanced learning, then it is indeed little more than donkey-work for both students and teachers. Let’s stretch the metaphor and look at taking the ‘Ass’ out of the ‘Assessment’ donkey, as a vehicle to stimulate our interactions, and to hopefully have a little fun along the way.

The second part of the session will focus on the essence of a tool for **Enhancement of Assessment Practices through Research-Based Self Evaluation and Review**

I will share the rationale underpinning the preparation and deployment of a self-evaluation and review tool at Edge Hill University. The tool contains question items, each of which has been derived from literature on successful approaches to assessment and feedback, the concept of Assessment for Learning (A4L) and the emergence of the notion of Assessment Literacy in Higher Education. The tools will be made available for use by attendees who may adopt, adapt and develop it for their own bespoke purposes.

Assessment ‘for’ Learning (A4L) as well as ‘of’ learning is an important approach to adopt if the process is to be deployed to help learners realise their full potential. The concept of Assessment Literacy (Price, 2012), which encompasses ‘Assessment confidence’ (Handley et al, 2012) through learners’ understanding ‘Discourse of assessment and feedback dialogue’ provides a useful frame of reference through which to describe assessment processes which are formative, hence developmental and focussed on improving likelihood of students to achieve at their maximal level.

This approach translates key aspects of A4L and Assessment Literacy and research derived foci into strategies for individual, group or whole institutional reflection. The reflection tool is based upon the literature and the author’s experience of assessment in schools and higher education internationally. Focus is given to the rationale and strategies for preparing students for assessment so that they are clearer about expectations of the form of the tasks they will undertake and how it they be graded and to approaches to feedback which capitalise on harnessing its formative powers in addition to its summative ‘measurement’ functions.

The session and tool provides an agenda for professional development of teachers and harnesses the concepts of modelling, scaffolding and metacognition within the A4L process. I assert that assessment can be a secret garden, a ‘Black Box’ into which learners (and teachers in their professional development) should be allowed to see into with clarity. Understanding the rules, language, expectations and permission to demonstrate criticality are central to the argument that A4L is a profound approach to enabling learners to demonstrate what they know and can do to the best possible effect.

The focus on Assessment Literacy relates to:

- ‘Assessment confidence’ (Price et al, 2012). (If students know how it works, they are more likely to succeed)

- 'Discourse of assessment and feedback dialogue' (Price, 2005). (Teachers showing examples of work and talking about how they assess and then discussing this with the students)
- 'Self-evaluative ability, independent learning and employability' (Boud, 2009) (Students, through a better understanding of assessment and feedback, can take more charge and know more about their strengths and areas for development)
- 'Useful evaluation' (Price et al 2010). (Feedback is key: students need to understand why they got their grade and how to improve).

The session and the tool are thus intended as a vehicle for enhancement of the student experience by academics anchoring development activity in concrete, research-based fashion in the Boyerian spirit of application and integration of knowledge.

For reference:

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Haynes, S. N. & Kaholokula, J.K. (2007). Behavioural assessment. In: Hersen and A. M. Gross Handbook of Clinical Psychology (495-524). New York: John Wiley

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Centre for Learning and Teaching, Edge Hill University: Some Helpful Thoughts about Assessment for Success