

Assessment and Reporting in Australian Schools

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Chapter One – Introduction to Assessment and Reporting

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Nicole and I have taught assessment and reporting both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels now for a number of years. We hope this book is both informative and helpful in developing your understanding of assessment and its use in Australian schools along with the important principles associated with reporting academic progress to the various key stakeholders.

This edition is a compilation of various chapters on vital aspects of assessment and reporting in the school context that should provide you with a deeper, and more importantly, more practical understanding and working knowledge of how to use assessment in your own context to better achieve student outcomes.

Whilst this text is set for a course here at the University of Southern Queensland, it is suitable for anyone who is looking for a more complete understanding of effective assessment and how to use these characteristics to produce high quality assessment instruments. This is accompanied with some important reporting principles that should be followed to better meet the needs of your local educational community.

Whilst the content of this text is based on established theory and properly conducted scholarly research, we try to make the course as practical as possible to better prepare our readers for the work they will be, or are, doing as practitioners in the field of education.

The purpose of this book is to introduce the principles of effective assessment and reporting that are highlighted in the course in a pragmatic manner. Again, these are important characteristics to be considered when conducting all types of assessment and reporting and not just for the attainment of a passing grade in this university course. There are more concepts and theories that could be explored in this text, but are outside the gamut of the course, and would make the text too long to read, and furthermore too complex to easily implement as a beginning teacher.

It is our aim to equip you with not only with the knowledge of the theory behind effective assessment, but also with how to practically implement these principles. By the end of this course, we hope that you feel confident in your ability to read a syllabus document, create a quality assessment item with accompanying rubric and use these to give useful feedback to students, administration and parents. To do this, however, a thorough understanding of these theoretical underpinnings is necessary.

There are a number of essential terms when we begin to talk about assessment. We discuss it in a number of capacities such as assessment *for* learning, assessment *of* learning and assessment *as* learning. Assessment *for* learning refers to formative assessment, which should be coupled with student feedback and can, and should, inform future teaching. Assessment *of* learning normally denotes summative assessment that usually represents the final or culminating assessment that counts towards the calculation of overall achievement levels that gets included in student progress reports. Assessment *as* learning signifies situations where students can consider their own learning to date and make meaning from those self-reflection opportunities.

We suggest that a number of characteristics or principles make up effective assessment and should be followed when creating your own assessment instruments. A number of these are discussed in the course in more detail. These are briefly introduced here below. Firstly, and some argue most importantly, validity. *Validity* essentially refers to the level to which the content covered in the teaching process and in the curriculum matches the content in the assessment tool. Reliability is also a key feature of useful and constructive assessment. *Reliability* is present when there are factors in place that ensure consistency of marking and dependable overall judgement of student results. *Fairness* ensures that no one, or one group of students are disadvantaged or negatively impacted by being asked to complete the assessment. *Flexibility* allows for choice, both in content, where appropriate, and in format or design of delivery or submission. The last feature that we highlight is authenticity, which considers the extent to which the assessment instrument used has relevance to a real life context and to what extent it demonstrates meaning in the lives of the children undertaking the task.

The interpretation of data is considered in the course and has two chapters designated to it in this book. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is a major focus (some would argue too much of a focus) for many schools and helping prepare children for this important test is mentioned. The rich data that is collected from NAPLAN and indeed other standardised testing iterations is an imperative discussed and analysed. This then, helps prepare students who will be pedagogical practitioners in their own right to study their own data, in order to gain valuable insights into what they can do to help their student body achieve higher scholastic outcomes.

The provision of timely, clear and meaningful feedback to students is also covered in the course and in this book. We advocate for this feedback to be made to students to better inform the teaching and learning process as well as to help students attain higher levels of achievement in their subject disciplines. The use of highly informative reports on student progress is conferred in the text and in the course. The intentional use of particular principles and strategies for reporting student achievement is mentioned, whilst what makes up meaningful comments to parents and other key stakeholders is also practiced. The importance of effective parent teacher interviews is addressed also.

Students will be given the opportunity to practice writing their own assessment task sheets along with task specific rubrics or criteria sheets that align with the

task being undertaken. Students will also garner a reasonable level of proficiency in completing student profiles and in completing the moderation process involved with determining end of semester overall results.

Lastly, a discussion as to what modifications can and should be made for particular students whilst catering for diversity is revealed. Adaptations and accommodations in terms of assessment are addressed while also mentioning the more highly contentious issue of how we assess students for identification of exceptional needs and accompanying funding.

At the time of writing, the educational landscape around senior secondary assessment processes in Queensland is facing significant change. To align with the practices of other Australian states and with the introduction of a National Curriculum, we here in Queensland are facing major changes to how we assess and ascertain exit level of achievement scores for senior secondary school leavers. Currently we have a system that is totally internally driven and decided. That is to say, that we use a common syllabus to write a local school based work program from which to operate. This work program contains the assessment and the units of work that will be covered in the two senior years of schooling, Years 11 and 12. Individual school used assessment and judgements are externally monitored and verified through complex and detailed moderation procedures, which maintain a level of consistency and reliability across the state. These processes are all about to change.

In 2019, we are moving to a more externally driven assessment model for the senior secondary years. School created work programs will no longer form part of the senior secondary vernacular. Year 12 (summative year) will have four pieces of assessment which will have to be checked and "endorsed" before use with students. Three of these pieces will be largely prescribed by the state syllabus; the details of which will seemingly be uniform across the state. The fourth piece will be an external examination where all students studying that subject in the state will sit an unseen paper at the same time. This external exam in most subjects will count towards 25% of the final aggregate of marks that go to awarding an exit level of achievement, while in Maths and Science subjects this external exam will count towards 50% of the final mark. Students will no longer sit the Queensland Core Skills Test and will not receive an Overall Position (OP) Score at the end of Year 12. Rather they will attain a rank score of up to 99.95 called an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). How all of this will unfold in the next couple of years will be fascinating to watch in order to determine how the assessment practices of senior secondary in this state will evolve.

We trust that you will enjoy the book and the course. We hope you find it both practical and informative in your consideration of what assessment is, and how best to prepare you, so that you feel confident to create effective assessment pieces that best meet the needs of your students.