



Assessment Appetiser for Module 2: Staffroom Scene

Purpose:

To raise issues that can occur during assessment OF learning.

What you need:

- 1 copy of pages 1 and 2 (back-to-back) per pair of teachers.

Step 1:

- Give pairs time to read the Scenario on page 2.

Step 2:

- DISCUSS the questions below in pairs, then bring your ideas to the whole group for open discussion.

Questions for discussion:

1. What assessment issues emerge in this scenario?

Have any of these issues ever arisen here, in this school/context?

Or elsewhere in your experience?

What happened?

2. How does assessment of learning help or hinder students' learning?

3. Do our assessment tasks challenge our students to think deeply across domains and integrate their understandings?

Scenario:

As you read through your fourteenth piece of “marking” you get a feeling of vague familiarity. When your eyes register the term “intercultural communication” a sense of deep unease hits your stomach. Uh-oh! It was only last week that you were surfing and came across that term for the first time yourself. You turn on your computer, open the browser, enter the term in a search engine. Up pops a list of sites. As you scan them, you recognise the one you were reading last week. As you scroll through it your suspicions are confirmed. Plagiarism. Mmmnnn: such a harsh word for copying, you think, but might as well call it as it is. This kid has handed in work they didn’t do themselves. Huge blocks are copied. As you print off the web page you sip your coffee, then staple the evidence to the student’s work and move on to number fifteen.

(Next day.)

“You could just pretend you didn’t notice,” Maria says in the staffroom.

“You can’t do that,” argues Simon, “We have to take a stand. If they get away with it now, they’ll become a serial cheater. The web makes it too easy to copy stuff”.

Sali said: “I think one of my students has handed in something her mother has helped a bit too much with. The language is much more sophisticated than what she usually writes in class. Why does she feel that her mother’s work is going to help her learn?”

Silence settles.

You all overhear three other teachers whinging about their “marking” - how time-consuming it is and how boring. You sit. You listen. You sip your coffee. You reach over and pick up a piece from the “marked” pile of one of your colleagues and look at the “test”. What immediately strikes you is that the questions only seek basic recall of knowledge. Mmmnnn. Think. Deep breathe – plunge in. You suggest that spanning into other intelligences, across higher levels of thinking beyond “the facts” e.g. the creative, might make the work more interesting for both the students and the teacher. “Perhaps authentic, performance assessment with portfolios would be more helpful for students’ learning and also more fun to mark,” you suggest.

Cold stares - and no other reply.

“OK – they probably think I’m on something!” you think, and you say out loud: “Well, we have to do something different to get the kids thinking more”.

“I worry about the second language learners in my class” Sali mused, “They really struggle with writing, even when they understand their stuff - somehow I need to give them a better way to show it”. “There are boys in my class who can illustrate their thinking through role-plays, or when they create their Powerpoint shows - they’re brilliant with visual imagery,” you suggest. “But they never do well on written assignments. I need to work out how to stretch their thinking, make them go beyond.”

Simon continues: “That’s true - we’re not fair to those students who aren’t strong verbally. I’m not sure I get my students to even think very often. I’m sure some students are never challenged at all – they’re just cruising, and their understanding could be pushed much deeper. I think my assessment needs to be more open-ended so kids can show a range of performances - across different levels in the Standards. That would lift the challenge level a bit for some of my kids”.

“My girls do badly whenever I set a conventional test - and I know they know their work,” you add.

Silence. Again.

Sali sips his coffee.

“Maybe we should review our whole assessment practices and come up with some multi-domain tasks that are focussed on the kinds of deep understanding we want. And if we had rubrics that showed kids what we were looking for in their work, they wouldn’t have to try and cheat. That might help us through this maze”, suggests Maria.

You all turn and stare at her.

“Oh no,” you think, “Just what I need - more work. Should have kept my mouth shut.”