Level 6 The Arts - Negotiated Assessment

PEEL in Practice: 1300 ideas for quality teaching
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1. Background
I have long believed that students need to know the criteria we assess them on. The use of explicit criteria in VCE assessment has, to some extent, filtered down through the year levels. For many years I have made my assessment criteria clear to students before they start on a piece of work, from Year 7 to Year 12. I believe assessment is an integral aspect of learning and, like many teachers, always feel frustrated by those students who throw their work in the bin as soon as they get it back from the teacher (whether it got an A+ or a D!). How to get students to learn from their mistakes and to take on board the comments we laboriously make on their work?

2. Why negotiate?
If students have a say in the way their work is to be assessed, they have more ownership of their work and a deeper understanding of what is required to achieve a particular level / grade / etc.

It also means that students feel more valued in the classroom. Their contributions are recognised and given importance by their teacher. I think this also means that our assessment of their work makes more sense to them. (Students often seem to believe that we pull their marks, reports and so on straight out of a hat. What they have actually done or not done has no apparent bearing on the mark they receive.)

Another compelling reason is that students often think of aspects of the task that we overlook. Last year I set my Year 9 Media class a research report and included what I thought was a reasonable set of assessment criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME:</th>
<th>High (8-10 points)</th>
<th>Medium (5-7 points)</th>
<th>Low (2-4 points)</th>
<th>N/A (0-1 point)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Research</td>
<td>Used a wide range of sources.</td>
<td>Used a range of sources.</td>
<td>Used a minimal range of sources.</td>
<td>No evidence of any research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Content Biography / History</td>
<td>Conveys a wide range of information on the chosen topic(s).</td>
<td>Conveys a range of information on the chosen topic(s).</td>
<td>Conveys a minimal range of information on the chosen topic(s).</td>
<td>Conveys little information on the chosen topic(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Content Importance to the world of film</td>
<td>Extensive &amp; detailed discussion of your subject's importance</td>
<td>Broad discussion of your subject's importance</td>
<td>Limited discussion of your subject's importance</td>
<td>Minimal / no discussion of your subject’s importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Timeline</td>
<td>Clear &amp; accurate timeline</td>
<td>Moderately clear timeline</td>
<td>Timeline included but unclear</td>
<td>No timeline</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Referencing (citing sources)</td>
<td>All sources (information &amp; graphics) cited correctly.</td>
<td>Most sources (information &amp; graphics) cited correctly</td>
<td>Some sources (information &amp; graphics) cited correctly</td>
<td>No citing of sources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Use of graphics</td>
<td>Highly effective use of graphics</td>
<td>Moderately effective use of graphics</td>
<td>Ineffective use of graphics</td>
<td>Poor use of graphics</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The problem with this grid only became apparent after I had marked the students' reports and handed them back. One of the students stayed back after the bell to discuss why he had got such a poor grade. I had marked it using the grid but because this student had focused on the content and had not included any graphics and his timeline was unclear, his grade had dropped rather drastically. I realised that this student valued the content more than the presentation (as did I!). Consequently I marked his report again, this time weighting the criteria.

For the next assessment task (an essay on thriller films) the assessment grid looked like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME:</th>
<th>Very High (9-10)</th>
<th>High (7-8)</th>
<th>Medium (5-6)</th>
<th>Low (3-4)</th>
<th>Very Low (1-2)</th>
<th>N/A (0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Knowledge of film elements</strong> (double marks)</td>
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<td>2. <strong>Neatness</strong> (1/4 marks)</td>
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<td>3. <strong>Name included</strong> (1/4 marks)</td>
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<td>4. <strong>Meets suggested length</strong></td>
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<td>5. <strong>Structure of essay</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. <strong>Uses examples from films studied</strong> (double marks)</td>
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<td>7. <strong>Evidence of planning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. <strong>Self-assessment done</strong> (1/2 marks)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. **The process**

I'll use my Year 8 Media classes as an example. One of their assessment tasks is to produce a live video clip in groups (4 camera operators & 1 vision mixer). After we had viewed their clips we discussed what things we should look for when assessing our live video production. It was agreed that camera operators should be marked on:

1. smooth camera movement
2. framing of shots
3. no bumps

Vision mixers

1. smooth wipes
2. not cutting too often / not cutting enough
3. choosing appropriate wipes
The following week I discussed with the class whether they saw any benefit from being involved in setting the assessment criteria. Positives stated by the students were:

- they could achieve better grades because they knew what to do to get A+
- students know what they're being marked on
- students can focus on their good points
- gives students the chance to explain what they think is important

We also discussed what things should be included in assessment of their workbooks. I asked students to individually list things down, then we shared ideas and I wrote these up on the board. Finally, I asked them to consider the whole list and decide which items were the most important and we voted on these with a show of hands.

The final list was:

- neatness
- all work completed
- content
- amount of work
- information is correct
- presentation

The last item was included after a student asked whether neatness and presentation were the same thing. After some discussion the class agreed they were not the same and presentation should be included.

Another of their assessment tasks is to produce an edited music video clip in small groups. Once I have set the task and explained exactly what they have to do, I show them a few examples from previous classes. Some of these are clearly better than others and the students' reactions and comments often agree with mine. We then discuss what grades each of these clips should receive. After much shouting of 'A', 'C', 'A+++++', etc. I then ask how we should judge what gets an A, B, C, etc. The ensuing discussion starts to clarify for the students what makes one clip better than another. As comments come in from the students about what to assess I list them on the board. As the discussion dries up I change tack and ask the students to look at the list and decide which items are most important in making a good clip. The discussion now revolves around the weighting of assessment criteria.

**4. Taking it further?**

I did consider the idea of taking the process a bit further by getting students to actually assess their own work. I surveyed my Year 9 students on this, along with their thoughts on helping set criteria, etc. The students were quite positive about the benefits of being involved in the assessment process but were overwhelmingly against the idea of assessing their own work. Reasons for this were largely to do with fairness. 'Someone might give themselves an A+ when they don't deserve it', 'An honest student might give themselves a C while someone else whose work is at the same level might get a B.'
5. Conclusion

Once students become involved in assessment procedures (helping to set criteria, weighting, self-assessing and peer-assessing) they develop a clearer understanding of what is required to achieve a particular level. They also feel more valued by their teacher. In fact, once begun it's a process that's hard to stop. I recently set my Year 11 students a group production assessment task. Almost before I had finished explaining the task a student asked, 'How's it going to be assessed?' I threw the question straight back to the class 'How do you think it should be assessed?' The students immediately threw up several suggestions which went on the board. After a brief discussion the following list was agreed to:

1. Quality of final product
2. Cooperation
3. Planning & production of each step
4. Effort
5. Meets intended purpose

6. Group Discussion

The discussion that followed my presentation was wide-ranging. Some discussed the value of negotiating assessment with students and thought about possibilities in their own subject area; some raised the need for an 'X factor' in assessment to cater for the extraordinary response from a student and some pointed out that negotiating the actual grade descriptors with students was probably more valuable than negotiating the assessment criteria.

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