Focus Question:
What exactly is a rubric and what types are there?

Using Rubrics with assessment OF Learning

Quality assessment OF learning is Standards-based and promotes integrated and powerful learning, where students are challenged, yet guided by clear signposts of what they have to do and against what criteria their efforts will be judged.

“In a surface approach to a learning task, the student perceives that it is necessary to remember the body of knowledge. Mostly this would involve the need to rote-learn and then recall the facts concerned … [In] a deep approach to a learning task … the student perceives that it is necessary to make meaning of the content concerned, to be able to appraise it critically and to be able to apply the knowledge to other contexts of knowledge domains … The most influential factor in shaping those perceptions turns out to be the nature of the assessment task … The power of assessment to influence the approach adopted towards a learning task is very considerable” (Dunn et al. 2004, p. 10).

Multi-domain assessment tasks are authentic and productive. They are relevant and meaningful to the student, are problem-based, integrate a range of learning goals across domains and offer opportunities for deep understanding of the ‘big ideas’. Multi-domain assessments may be negotiated with students, individually or in groups. They usually involve extended pieces of work that build in thinking, problem-solving, student decision-making and performances of understanding (Blythe 1998). They include portfolios, problem-based learning tasks, exhibitions and performances.

What is a Rubric?
“The word rubric derives from ruber, the Latin word for red. In medieval times a rubric was a set of instructions or a commentary attached to a law or liturgical service and typically written in red. Thus rubric came to mean something that authoritatively instructs people. In student assessment, a rubric is a set of scoring guidelines for evaluating students’ work … Typically, a rubric contains a scale of possible points to be assigned in scoring work on a continuum of quality … A rubric provides descriptors for each level of performance, to enable more reliable and unbiased scoring. Sometimes indicators [student samples of what the quality looks like] are used … to provide examples or concrete tell-tale signs of each level” (Wiggins 1998, p. 154).

Types of Rubrics
• An analytic rubric “divides a product or performance into essential traits or dimensions so that they can be judged separately — one analyzes a product or performance for essential traits. A separate [rating] is provided for each trait” (Arter and McTighe 2001, p. 18). A typical analytic rubric is the most common table form used in many Victorian schools with horizontal rows for each criterion and boxes describing four levels of quality across the row. They are good for assessing complex tasks such as multi-domain assessment tasks and also for giving specific feedback on particular aspects of the work. There is no “correct” number of criteria or rows to use — but too many becomes daunting (for both the student and the teacher). As a rule of thumb try to fit the rubric on one A4 page. More than 10 rows and you are probably moving away from KEY criteria. A famous example, not presented in the standard table format, is the “6+1 Traits for Writing” rubric (NWREL) produced in the US. It has separate criteria for each of: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions and the plus 1 is Presentation. You can have a look at it via:
• A global or holistic rubric “gives a single score or rating for an entire product or performance based on an overall impression of a student’s work. In essence, one combines all the important ingredients of a performance or product to arrive at an overall single judgment of quality” (Arter and McTighe 2001, p. 18). Sometimes these are called “rocket” rubrics because they have increasing levels of quality as you move up the page, often in four steps. A “Novice” standard, overall, would have these features... through to an “Expert” level has these features... etc. In this model, several criteria are collapsed into each level of performance or understanding. Many older judgements were made on a global scale like this. For example some universities use holistic rubrics with criteria for each of Pass, Credit, Distinction and High Distinction. Holistic rubrics are generally easier to develop and use - but not as helpful in providing feedback to students on their specific learning needs for future improvement. A detailed and famous example is the Holistic Critical Thinking rubric designed by the Faciones. You can have a look at it at: http://www.insightassessment.com/HCTSR.html

Task-Specific or Generic?
In generic rubrics, the criteria and descriptors of levels of performance remain the same across tasks. For example there are some good generic rubrics available for problem solving in mathematics, for research tasks and for oral presentations. However, they do not provide specific feedback on all aspects of a multi-domain assessment task. Task-specific rubrics are distinctly created for each assessment task and can provide better quality feedback on the details of the specified standards. There is a case for combining these two approaches. For example, there are some Standards that will be monitored across tasks and classes, such as for oral presentations, the use of ICT for presenting, or working well in groups, etc. There could be rows from rubrics that are consistently used across tasks and classes (and discipline areas) within a school, so that students get a consistent approach to these Standards. Other more task-specific criteria and descriptor rows can vary from task to task. In that way, the whole rubric does not have to be reinvented each time you design a multi-domain assessment task. You could build a bank of criteria and descriptors for levels of quality that are on your intra-net (or in the staffroom filing cabinet) that are frequently used across teachers and domains.

Web resources for rubrics
Check out the web for thousands of rubric ideas, rubric makers and samples of rubrics. One helpful website is Rubistar at http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php where you can make your own printable rubric, adapt another teacher’s rubric or search and download one of the thousands that are available there. For example, try searching for ‘collaboration’ using the tool on the front page, or ‘oral’, or ‘metacognition’, or another term that is appropriate for your context.

Criteria for High Quality Rubrics

| “1. Content/Coverage - Does the rubric cover the features that really indicate quality performance? |
| 2. Clarity/Detail - Does the rubric make it clear what you mean with definitions, indicators, and samples of work? |
| 3. Practicality - Do teachers and students find it useful for instruction and assessment? |
| 4. Technical Quality/Soundness/Fairness - Can you get raters to agree on scores? Is the rubric fair to all students?” |

(Arter and McTighe 2001, p. 72)

Reflective Question:

Do my rubrics meet the criteria for high quality rubrics?

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