Trust: a missing ingredient in curriculum and assessment reform?

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Overview

- Trust and distrust
- The centrality of assessment
- Learning-oriented assessment
- Trust, distrust and assessment
- Implications
Trust definition

• “A dynamic process in which two or more parties are involved in a series of interactions that may require a degree of risk or faith on the part of one or both parties” (Tierney, 2006, p. 57).
Distrust

- 'A complete absence of trust would prevent [one] even getting up in the morning.' (Luhmann, 1979, p.4).
Accountability and distrust

- Accountability as antithesis of trust (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011).
- Accountability and standardisation of universities reduces trust, inhibit risk-taking and innovation (Vidovich & Currie, 2011).
Accountability repercussions

- Accountability can become a source rather than a remedy for distrust.
- The new culture of accountability provides incentives for arbitrary and unprofessional choices (O’Neill, 2002).
The centrality of assessment

• What students learn; the effort they make; and the nature of their learning is largely determined by their perceptions of the summative assessments they undertake.

• Curriculum reform undermined if assessment is not engineered skillfully.
Learning-oriented assessment

- Loa = assessment which places a primary focus on improving student learning;
- Including summative assessment which stimulates productive student learning (Carless, 2007).
Learning oriented assessment framework (LOAF)

Assessment task design for productive learning

Participative assessment through peer feedback and self-evaluation

Dialogic feedback

Learning-oriented Assessment Framework
Assessment task design principles

- Align with aims and intended outcomes.
- Be cumulative rather than one-off.
- Capture student effort across topics and weeks (Gibbs, 2006).
- Involve co-operative elements e.g. projects or group work.
- Stimulate complex/deep learning.
Participative assessment

• Shared responsibility for making judgments about work and gaining insight into how such judgments are made (Reynolds & Trehan, 2000).
• Participation in peer feedback and self-evaluation.
• Engaging with quality in the discipline.
Dialogic feedback

• Interactive exchanges in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated and expectations clarified (Carless et al., 2011).

• In-class peer and self-evaluative activities.

• Students write on their assignment which areas they would most like feedback on (Nicol, 2010).
“Assessment trust”

• The confidence or faith one has in the likelihood of others acting responsibly and professionally with respect to sound principles and practices in assessment (Carless, 2009).
Challenges for task design

- Examinations traditional and low-risk eg discourage plagiarism, copying;
- Essays as gold-standard;
- Doubts about alternative assessment eg free-riders in group projects; reliability issues.
- Difficulties of establishing more innovative approaches; conservatism of assessment.
Challenges for participative assessment

• Students may not trust peers’ competence or integrity.

• Students need to invest faith in their peers and allow their own work to be critiqued i.e. placing themselves in a vulnerable state.
Challenges for dialogic feedback

• Trust as factor in feedback processes because of affective and emotional challenges.

• Structural constraints: time, institutional procedures etc.

• Robustness of teacher-student relationships?

• Willpower ... capacities.
Dialogue is facilitated by trusting relationships in which participant’s value the views of others and respond empathetically in atmospheres in which students can take risks (Carless, 2013b).
Implications
Possible ways forward

• Transparency and communication with students.
• Collaboration: more sharing between staff.
• The development of Assessment literacy amongst all stakeholders.
But ... 

- When distrust is powerful and pervasive, all strategies to enhance trust may be undermined (Carless, 2009).
A pedagogy of trust

- Trust is a critical ingredient in learning.
- Educational relationships need trust between teachers and students.
- Caring (Noddings).
- Pedagogical tact (van Manen).
- Risk-taking (Barnett).
THANK YOU