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Student self-assessment: What have we learned and what are the challenges?

Autoevaluación del estudiante: ¿Qué hemos aprendido y cuáles son los desafíos?

Taras, Maddalena
University of Sunderland

Resumen

Este artículo examina los principales temas que han sido una preocupación constante para los investigadores en el tema de la auto-evaluación de los alumnos en el mundo de habla inglesa. Estos incluyen si los estudiantes deben calificar su propio trabajo y si lo hacen adecuadamente, si hay bastantes precisión en la calificación y si la autoevaluación les empodera. Presentamos estos temas dentro de su contexto histórico, el análisis incluye los contextos y las creencias que motivaron su desarrollo. Los datos demuestran que la poca aceptación de autoevaluación está en contra de la investigación sobre la teoría y la práctica, la cual pone de relieve su importancia para apoyar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes y para posibilitar a los tutores un curriculum coherente y consistente con las normas y objetivos. Mediante el examen de las definiciones es posible deshacer los prejuicios sobre el proceso y las cualidades de auto-evaluación de los alumnos y hacer la pregunta - ¿son nuestros procedimientos aptos para el siglo 21? Por último, mediante la presentación de la comprensión de las topologías y categorías de procesos de autoevaluación de los estudiantes tanto en la enseñanza obligatoria como en la educación superior, es posible proponer las opciones puestas a disposición por la investigación para permitir la integración de la auto-evaluación de los alumnos en nuestras aulas.

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Abstract

This paper examines major issues that have been a perennial concern for researchers into student self-assessment within the Anglophone world. These include, whether students should grade their own work and if they do grade, if accuracy of grading is important, and if self-assessment empowers. By presenting these issues within their historical background, the discussion provides the contexts and beliefs which motivated the developments, Data demonstrating the little take-up of self-assessment is counter to the research into theory and practice which highlights its centrality to supporting learning for students and enabling coherent aligned curricula for tutors. By examining definitions it is possible to unpick beliefs about the process and qualities of student self-assessment and ask the question – are our processes fit for the 21st century? Finally, by presenting understandings of topologies and categories of student self-assessment processes both in the K-12 sector and in higher education, it is possible to proffer the choices made available by research to enable integration of student self-assessment into our own classrooms

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This paper focuses on developments on student self-assessment and asks the questions: "What have we learned? What are the challenges?" It examines issues which have

Autor de contacto / Corresponding autor

Taras, Maddalena. Faculty of Education and Society. University of Sunderland. Forster Building. Chester Road. Sunderland SR1 3SD. *E-mail:* maddalena.taras@sunderland.ac.uk

been linked to historical and educational developments in order to take stock as to what student self-assessment might mean in current discourses and contexts. The aim of this paper is to provide educationalists with the background in the basic issues to enable them to make informed choices on what might be most appropriately adapted for their context and at what stage.

Issues in student self-assessment include whether students should grade their own work; if they do grade, if accuracy of grading is important; the place of power within models, and if varying processes and topologies include or exclude students in the assessment community. Subsequently, it examines self-assessment definitions and asks if the standard definitions are fit for purpose in the 21st century. New discourses of student inclusion, learning and learner-centredness, of proactive agents with voice, all require students at the epicentre of processes. However, as part of socially constructed communities, they are also part of a closely knit academic community.

Taras (2010, 2014) has provided two different topologies or categorisations of five self-assessment models according to relative empowerment of students and also how tutor power may be affected. This paper builds on Taras (2009, 2010, 2014), which provided an overview of self-assessment models and their essential characteristics: however, this paper provides a different focus by examining when the self-assessment takes place within the learning cycle or phase, what and how may it influence this learning cycle. In addition, given the unclear divide between HE and the K-12 sector, it also examines the three models presented by Brown and Harris (2013) and determines if and how they relate to the models identified by Taras in HE.

Although the focus here is primarily on self-assessment in HE, it will become evident that it is impossible to separate it from the K-12 compulsory sector. Firstly, education departments and faculties work at the interface of both sectors: secondly, web access to journals and research has facilitated sharing worldwide and across subjects and specialisms, no matter the context. Thirdly, principles and epistemologies provide a basis for developing ideas, innovations and pedagogies no matter the contexts.

In an ideal world and according to the literature, student self-assessment would permeate and be integrated into all strata and aspects of student thinking and learning processes. Alverno College, a four-year, liberal arts, independent college for women, located in Milwaukee, has integrated student self-assessment into all its processes since 1973. It has been a unique, bright beacon in a relatively dark student self-assessment HE world and its own extensive publications provide an example of how student self-assessment can work in practice and therefore, its practices will not be dealt with here (http://www.alverno.edu/).

Developments in student self-assessment in the Anglophone world

Student self-assessment has a long and complex history sustained by the passionate few. Despite theory, empirical research and proven practice demonstrating that it is central to developing students in self-regulated learning, autonomy and independence (Boekaerts et al 2005; Butler & Winne 1995; Zimmerman 2002), providing voice and empowering (Taylor & Robinson 2009), and for tutors, enabling a coherent and aligned curriculum, it is still a minority practice. Historical contexts and social priorities have influenced the focus of research and developments in student self-assessment. Student self-assessment has been different things at different times in history: it is by understanding social developments in education that the differences in discourses and functions attributed to student self-assessment become clearer.

Since the recorded use of student self-assessment in the US in the 1930s (Boud 1995), self-assessment has been demonstrated as an efficient means of supporting student learning. In this article, when the term 'self-assessment' is used and not qualified

otherwise, it refers to the standard model of student self-assessment which was developed in the US in the 30s: this model requires students to evaluate their work according to agreed criteria and standards and possibly provide distinctions of stronger and weaker elements, and optionally a grade.

The discourses in the 1970s and 1980s of student independence and autonomy created a rupture between tutors and students. Emphasis is placed on students being able to develop and work without direct and immediate support from tutors, and instead looking to peers and external help (Boud 1995; Cowan 2006; Reynolds & Trehan 2000). The 1980s and 1990s were a period of renewed interest in student involvement in assessment in HE and Reynolds and Trehan (2000: 269) provide an overview of self- and peer assessment at this time. In the UK and Australia, Boud carried out extensive work on supporting self-assessment which is effectively summarised in his 1995 book: an important feature of the book was a number of case-studies of different educational and subject contexts showing the adaptability of the student self-assessment process. Cowan (2006), another giant of self-assessment, disseminated his ideas extensively in the UK and across Asia. The SAPHE (Self-assessment in Professional and Higher Education) Project (Hinett and Thomas 1999) disseminated and developed self-assessment in a number of HE institutions in England in an attempt to increase its limited use which was also confirmed for Wales and Scotland (Glasner 1999; Hounsell *et al*., 1996). Taras (2014) reported an increase in an English HEI over the period 2000 to 2014.

Why student self-assessment?

This paper is based on the premises that the following provide evidence that use and understanding of self-assessment is a necessary support for learning:

- social and educational discourses (Dearing 1997; Taras 2002),
- learning theories (James 2005),
- assessment theories (Black and Wiliam 2003, 2006, 2009; Sadler 1989, 2010; Taras 2002, 2009, 2010, 2012),
- empirical research on assessment (Black and Wiliam 1998; Crooks 1988; Hattie and Timperley 2007; Natriello 1987; Brown and Harris 2013; Wiliam 2007),
- practice (Boud 1995; Boud & Falchikov 1989; Dochy et al 1999; Cowan 2006; Taras 2001, 2003; Dragemark Oscarson 2009; Brown & Harris 2013).

Despite this, over 80 years later, it is still considered a niche market for the enthusiastic few rather than a necessary aspect of learner, learning-centredness and inclusive, ethical practices, because of its relative lack of use as part of classroom assessment processes (Brown & Harris 2013; Taras & Davies 2013).

Little uptake of student self-assessment

Despite developments over time and pockets of increased enthusiasm for self-assessment, both Brown and Harris (2013) for K-12 and Taras (2014) for HE, show that the use of self-assessment is by no means universal. Reported use can only provide a vague indication of the reality: Brown and Harris cite research with Canadian secondary teachers where 23% of the 4,148 Canadian secondary teachers sampled reported never using self-assessment, with 58% reporting minimal self-assessment use (in Hunter, Mayenga & Gambell 2006). In Finland, only half of 346 surveyed upper secondary students reported participating in self-assessment (Lasonen, 1995).

In HE in the UK, peer and self-assessment were reported as rare (Glasner 1999: 17-8; Orsmond et al 2000: 24). Recent data collected over a 10 year period of 142 staff across different subject areas and disciplines within an institution shows there has been an increase in engagement with self-assessment (Taras 2014). Data from 2000 to 2002 collected from 42 social science lecturers showed that 17% of tutors used student self-assessment for feedback and 9.5% used it for grading, with 74% never using it. Data collected in 2006 from 50 education lecturers reported 70% of

tutors used student self-assessment, with an additional 2% saying sometimes whereas 28% never used it. In 2010, data from science lecturers showed 56% used student self-assessment whereas 44% reported not using it. Although the data does not indicate how often and how much tutors use student self-assessment, it does provide an indication of trends with engagement. Two things are to be noted, firstly that the studies did not set out to collect the same data and secondly, that when self-assessment is mentioned, it refers to the standard model.

The fact that 70% of education tutors report using student self-assessment is very positive; however, if 28% of education tutors never even consider using it, when they are at the cusp of new thinking, innovations and good practice, it helps to put the figures into perspective. As this short paragraph indicates, although there is incomparable data from across the world, it seems clear that nowhere is there consistent and systematic use of student self-assessment.

Assessment for Learning

Perhaps the real blooming of self-assessment within discourses of formative assessment came, on the cusp of the millennium, with the magical term 'Assessment for Learning' (AfL) which was in the context of the K-12 compulsory school sector.

> During the past two decades, student self-assessment has been strongly endorsed as an important aspect of formative assessment through the global assessment for learning (AFL) movement (Brown and Harris 2013: 367)

Perhaps it captured the imagination of educational practitioners world-wide because it had the support at government level in many countries (Stobart 2008). Also, the 1998, now seminal review by Black and Wiliam, provided research evidence which both persuaded and convinced:

> "Self-assessment by students is not an interesting option or luxury, it has to be seen as essential (Black & Wiliam 1998, 54-5)

The work of Black and Wiliam in English schools prompted the impetus to replicate it across continents and cultures because of its impact on student learning. The anthology by Berry and Adamson (2011) reports work in a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific Region on the use and dissemination of AfL.

> Almost all the teachers mentioned some form of self-assessment in their plans…the effect of the intervention can be seen to almost double the rate of student learning (Wiliam 2007: 1059)

Thus far, the thrust of AfL practice and principles would seem to accord with those of Alverno College (http://www.alverno.edu/) and accepted student self-assessment discourses. The world's love affair with AfL (Black et al. 2003, 123) seems to have cooled somewhat and the theoretical basis of AfL has been challenged in addition to the conflation of meaning between formative assessment and AfL (Taras 2012). As Taras (2012) notes, formative assessment has a long pedigree in HE and AfL is described in Black et al (2003) as four interventions (Taras 2009).

Debates within student self-assessment discourse

This paper asks some key rhetorical questions: **why** or **how** can self-assessment still be considered a luxury in higher education (HE) where learners are responsible adults; **how** can it justifiably be excluded from practice when current learning theories support social constructivist, and constructivist paradigms; **why** self-assessment is often ignored, despite theories demonstrating that self-assessment is an essential part of self-regulated learning and learners (surely an aim of HE).

Recent developments in K-12 on "Assessment for Learning" have brought student self-assessment into a new focus, but nevertheless, there is evidence that discourses are being derailed by questionable or even irrelevant historical throwbacks.

Should Students Grade in student self-assessment?

Grading, whether by students in self-assessment or by tutors, to represent achievement of learning outcomes, is a much discussed and debated area. Grades can only be an indirect and very crude representations of learning. The reliability of grades or classification are at their highest when tests and exams are at their simplest, therefore grading can only ever be approximate if complex, multi-criterion work is involved. Nonetheless, grades have been the mainstay and bed-rock of education and a social and political short-hand to represent achievement for academic success (Broadfoot & Black 2004).

Educationally, grades are even more problematic because they have been shown to impact on learning. The much cited work of Butler (1987, 1988) has illuminated how grades can influence learners (Black and Wiliam 1998; Hattie & Timperley 2007; Brown & Harris 2013). Butler (1987) showed that grades can incite students to be more involved in their work without affecting their performance. In the 1988 study, she showed that marks influence uptake of feedback and also of personal and emotional reactions. Comments alone produced learning improvements whereas comment when in conjunction with marks did not: there seems to be a finality linked to grades which impedes the uptake of comments. Similarly, giving praise focused on the person and did not impact on the work; being a good person did not link directly to producing better work (Butler 1987: 481). It is by focusing on the task that improvements were noted. Similarly, Sadler (1989) and Taras (2001, 2002) agreed that grades distract from understanding the assessment process and the criteria and standards. This link between grades and lack of student achievement led Black et al (2003) and others (Gardner 2006; Stobart 2008) to suggest that grades are best excluded from classroom learning.

This, however, does not mean that grades may not have a role in helping students to understand standards (Sadler 1989), but that the timing of the grades is all important. Taras (2002, 606) argues that in order to prevent interference with understanding and take up of feedback, students should receive their grade only after the pedagogic cycle of discussion with peers and tutors.

It is interesting that Alverno College, which has led developments in self-assessment since 1973, should have removed the giving of grades from their courses and programmes. They argue that a single letter or number cannot convey whether the content or applications of this knowledge to the real world have been mastered. As an alternative, they provide a "narrative transcript" which paints a detailed picture. However, Taras (2003) developed a technique of providing students with minimal feedback or none prior to peer discussion, because she found that students were guessing the grade she would be awarding from the comments. It is also possible that employers and interested parties will also scan the narrative transcripts to extract a grade as a short cut. Within such a universally engrained system of grades, it may be difficult to avoid or short-circuit them.

Accuracy in Grading

Past research on self-assessment as an assessment has had two central themes: whether students are reliably self-assessing, and the comparability of student and tutor grades or scores (Boud 1995; Tan 2012). Early self-assessment research was linked with discourses which suggested that student assessment might replace tutor assessment, if it could be demonstrated that student self-assessment could be sufficiently accurate (Cowan, 2006).

In the 1980s, the accuracy of the self-assessment was considered important because of the same belief that it might replace tutor assessments. Interestingly, this belief seems to have been transposed into current thinking:

> "It is also seen as a potential way for teachers to reduce their own assessment

> workload, making students more responsible for tracking their progress and feedback provision (Sadler & Good, 2006; Towler & Broadfoot, 1992)" (Brown and Harris 2013: 368)

Thus the issue of student self-assessment grading accuracy has been a long and perennial concern. However, since no examining body or institution would condone unverified student grades, the discussion has limited value although research continues to explore both reliability of student self-assessment and the comparability of student and tutor grades (McDonald & Boud 2003).

Ironically, tutor assessment was shown to be inconsistent and often inaccurate (Heron 1988, 82; Sadler 1989, 131), with novice tutors more accurate than experienced ones (Ecclestone & Swan 1999). The focus on student assessment accuracy led to a large body of research which continues to the present time, and often comparing tutor and student grades (Boud 1995; Boud & Falchikov 1989; McDonald & Boud 2003; Tan 2012).

Early research on student self-assessment accuracy has shown that novice students tend to slightly overrate and advanced students slightly underrate (Boud 1986: 3). In addition, low performing students are less accurate than high performing students:

> … but several studies have shown that the greatest improvement in performance through self-assessment was seen among the low performing students (Brown & Harris 2013: 387)

This indicates that pedagogic input and support is critical for improving accuracy in self-assessment. It would seem to confirm that autodidacts are likely to be in the minority and that tutors are unlikely to be expendable in education.

Currently, beliefs on the importance of student self-assessment accuracies vary greatly: for example, Brown and Harris (2013) adopt the strong view that accuracy is key in student self-assessment. Brown and Harris (2013, 367) argue that without a high degree of accuracy learners will not know that they are improving. Much of their student self-assessment review of the literature is linked to accuracy, whether it is linked to student age, ability, task features, and method of self-assessment (Brown and Harris 2013: 371).

However, they also cite research which demonstrates that practice make perfect, particularly in complex, multi-criterion contexts (Brown & Harris 2013: 367; Syed 2011, 74) and interestingly for poor students (see also Boud, 1986: 11, 13, 27; Boud, 1988: 89-90; Wood et al 1988:113; Syed 2011). They also show that regularity and understanding within the student self-assessment process is central to developing accuracy, as is maturity: evidence that older and more successful students are more accurate would seem to support this (Brown and Harris 2013; Tan 2012).

The position of this paper is that accuracy of student grading is secondary to the learning benefits of involving students within the assessment process. Tan (2012) supports this: he places greater importance on the evidence that self-assessment supports learning. Accuracy of student grading is helpful to students to confirm their understanding of standards and criteria (Sadler 1989) and again this is important for student learning and communication with peers and tutors. Practice makes perfect for everyone and within student self-assessment, increased expertise results in greater accuracy: research shows that similarly, lecturers' understandings of standards and criteria were developed by discussions and practice (Boyd & Bloxham 2014).

Power

The issue of whether student self-assessment empowers students has been of interest to relatively few researchers. In the 1980s, Heron (1988) found it of importance and concern as did Somervell (1993): both argued that assessment and particularly student self-assessment, is a political issue and should be viewed in the context of a democratic society.

A number of academics have also signalled that the standard student self-assessment model can become a confessional (Reynolds & Trehan 2000; Taras 2003, 2008; Tan 2004, 2009, 2012). Students may expose their personal thoughts and feeling during the processes of reflection and assessment which may be used against them.

Tan (2004, 2012) used different classifications of power to examine the standard student self-assessment process. Taras (2008) compared the relative empowerment of the standard student self-assessment model compared to the model with integrated peer and tutor feedback. Taras (2010, 2014) has provided classifications and topologies of self-assessment models according to relative empowerment of students and also how tutor power may be affected. The general conclusion is that the standard model is the least empowering of the student self-assessment models available.

Definitions

Definitions represent the theoretical platform on which practices and research are built. Examining definitions provide the epistemological grounding for the conceptualisation of the terms: the processes are also evident as are the inter-relation of the elements. Therefore, in seeking to understand differences in thinking between researchers, it is useful to begin by examining definitions.

Different definitions represent differing viewpoints. A number of aspects influence the different possible interpretations of self-assessment. First, agreeing and clarifying the parameters, that is, criteria, standards and learning outcomes; secondly, clarifying the process; thirdly, clarifying the product assessment; fourthly, the relative responsibility of each participant and linked to this, the support each participant may give or expect to receive.

Student self-assessment definitions in Higher Education

Two definitions of student self-assessment will be examined: that proffered by Alverno College and Boud.

Alverno College's definition of student self-assessment

At Alverno, self-assessment is embedded within 'Student Assessment-as-Learning. (http://www.alverno.edu/for_educators/student_as_learn.html). Assessment is aligned with teaching and learning as all stages, levels and every area of the institutional experience, and could have served as a model for Bigg's (1999) constructive alignment.

It is described with self-assessment being an essential aspect along with public criteria and feedback.

The definition of self-assessment is:

> The ability of a student to observe, analyze, and judge her performance on the basis of criteria and determine how she can improve it (http://depts.alverno.edu/saal/)

The definition identifies the four skills inherent in the self-assessment processes as well as the parameters. Students and tutors carry out the same assessment process of students' performances using the same public criteria which means both can form a basis for comparison and discussion, that is, students and tutors have a common forum and language.

Given that research indicates that task focus is productive for learners (Black & Wiliam 1998) it is surprising perhaps is that the initial focus of students' self-assessment is not on the task; however, Alverno is not focusing on the self, that is, the person, which has also been found to have negative effects, but on behaviour, that is, **what** learners do. This leads learners to identify patterns which support their understanding and productions. The third judging stage is easier because learners have already observed and reflected on their work, and they can now compare their performance to criteria. The last planning stage links past strategies and behaviours to future developments.

> In requiring students to integrate self-assessment into their problem-solving process, faculty have found that students show increasing understanding on inter-relationships of ability, content, and context (Loaker & Jensen 1988: 128)

The last part of the definition requires students to focus on their work after the judgement and "…determine how she can improve it". Taras (2001, 2003) argues that if students could do this prior to presenting their work for assessment, then surely they would have made the changes, unless time constraints alone prevented them from doing so. It is clear that self-assessment is not just about academic work: the holistic development of the person is the primary aim: it is also about process and not just product. This is a skill and focus which can be applied to all areas of their development.

Boud's definition of student self-assessment

> The defining characteristics of self-assessment is the involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgements about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards (Boud 1991: 5, in Boud 1995: 12)

and

> In the act of questioning is the act of judging ourselves and making decisions about the next step. This is self-assessment (Boud 1995: 1)

In Boud's definition, the key word is "involvement", it is with the involvement of students that the process is no longer about telling and becomes about participation and brings it into current thinking on theories of learning. Co-constructing meaning and understandings is thus the key to the definition. It does not necessarily mean that students have to reinvent the wheel. For example, with Alverno College, the criteria are published and public, and all participants in assessment need to negotiate understanding and use. Boud state that self-assessment cannot realistically take place unless learners have personalised and created their own criteria for each piece of work (1995). Taras (2001) attempts to attenuate this view, particularly given that institutional and award specific regulations often require prior publishing of criteria. By creating their own criteria at the beginning of a course, learners can still be the engines of creativity, while ultimately comparing their beliefs and findings to the published criteria. This has the double advantage of dispelling prior preconceptions and also of making the criteria, aims and goals their own. The criteria are thus directly linked to the goals and outcomes of learners. Black et al (2003) found that it was impossible to separate criteria from any other aspect of assessment. Interestingly, staff at Alverno agrees with Boud as concerns the centrality of criteria:

> Of all aspects of the assessment process, the use of criteria is perhaps the most important factor in directing student learning (Loaker & Jensen 1988: 130)

However, since Alverno works with published criteria at institutional level, it does not support the creation of criteria by students, although they will inevitably be contextualised and individualised for each piece of work.

Types, typologies and processes of self-assessment

This section examines the three student self-assessment processes identified for the K-12 compulsory sector (Brown & Harris 2013, 369) and then the five self-assessment models which can be conflated into three basic processes in the HE context (Taras 2010, 2014).

Brown and Harris (2013, 369) identify three types of self-assessment in K-12: (1) self-ratings, (2) self-estimates of performance, and (3) criteria- or rubric-based assessments. They are described as follows:

> "1. Self-rating requires students to judge quality or quantity aspects of their work using a rating system

2. Self-marking or grading of one's own work can also be done using either a marking guide for objectively answered questions or a rubric or model answer (Todd, 2002)
3. Lastly, and perhaps most classically associated with AFL, is the practice of using a rubric to ascertain the quality characteristics of the individual's written or performed work" (Brown and Harris 2013: 370)

The three types will be analysed in detail in order to ascertain similarities and differences in the processes. "Self-rating" uses a rating system to focus on quality or quantity of work: the question arises how exactly this is different or similar between this and the second type which uses a) a marking guide or b) a rubric or c) a model answer. Both type one and two of self-assessment are using a calque or answer system: the first judges either quality or quantity aspects, and the second provides a mark or grade (how are these related to the quality or quantity aspects of type one?

The third type uses rubrics, but so can the second type. The first like the third can also examine quality.

In addition "…all such tasks require reflection". In fact, all three types seem to have synonymous words to carry out a similar process of judgement: they can use an instrument of comparison against which students reflect on and compare their work. All of them may be equated to the self-marking model of HE (Taras 2010). Perhaps, the only clear distinction may be that some types use words to describe quality (as does the new Alverno system) and some might also require a mark or grade; however, this distinction is not made explicitly, although the following quote would seem to indicate this.

> Self-assessment practices may also encourage students to include comments or advice from the student to him or herself about how to improve. (Brown & Harris 2013, 369)

Perhaps it would be more accurate to view these three self-assessment types as all being self-marking which can then be classified into three sub-sections of self-marking. Self-assessment, like any assessment, may be applied to anything and everything (Scriven 1967) and perhaps making distinctions between differences in contexts may help educationalists to accept this.

As noted above, self-assessment, like all assessment, provides a gauge of quality of work produced by making a comparison of this work against a scale determined by criteria and standards. Historically, education and society has been less concerned by absolute standards (against criteria) and more concerned with ranking and selecting students relative to each other (Broadfoot 2007; Stobart 2008).

Even Hattie and Timperley's (2007) focus on an individual's learning progression makes comparisons with different stages of development and achievement. Society has deemed these comparisons of great importance (Broadfoot & Black 2004) because it believes it permits a selection of the best students. What we do, or how we do it, is important morally and ethically, as studies demonstrate that there are different pedagogic impacts with the choice of processes (Black & Wiliam 1998; Hattie & Timperley 2007).

Socially, politically and educationally, an external exam is considered a final stage in students' educational journeys: the grade or mark also has a finality that is real and tangible. (Rowntree, 1987) cites research which shows that even very young children are aware of the importance of grades and that these are linked to the students who are the best in class at any given activity. They are also aware of their own relative position in the class ranking. To classify, rank and grade are accepted norms. At all ages, a 45% mark when the pass level is 40% is recognised as being weak. Whether this mark is used as a stepping-stone to help learning or to make students feel that this aspect of learning is finished is an important distinction which will influence how the mark is perceived and received.

In the same way that an assessment has different impacts depending on what and how it is done, so self-assessment too is not a single, monolithic process with the same impact on students and tutors. Not only is the 'what' and 'how' important but the 'when' will also provide social and political messages.

Taking Taras' (2014) classification as a starting point, the three self-assessment processes and five models will be examined within a potential learning cycle.

Self-marking

Many tutors will use self-marking without necessarily relating it to self-assessment and yet it is a very efficient means to include and introduce students to all the complexities of assessment. Self-marking is unlikely to happen at the end of important phases of learning from which tutors require a summative mark which will become official. Self-marking at its best is when students devise a mark-sheet or model (with tutor support), which is then used for peer and self-assessment. It then becomes a social activity where negotiations of understanding help learning. The whole of the self-marking process becomes part of the learning cycle and the final grade can be tutor monitored and thus become official.

So why, is self-marking unlikely to happen for important exams or tests? Quite simply, because exams and test are something which are 'done' to students rather than something which students can do for themselves. Exams are rarely considered a part of learning or teaching, which explains to a degree why they have often been an add-on and not aligned with the rest of the curriculum. The reasons why students are excluded are not pedagogic, but social, political and logistical. There is also a compartmentalisation of learning which is exacerbated by modularisation as opposed to whole academic year courses. Tutors move on from their classes and their responsibilities are finished.

Self-marking where students are central agents in producing the mark sheet, is very efficient in promoting remedial learning, cooperative learning, clarifying criteria and standards, and importantly, allowing students to be critical assessors and develop an understanding of quality (Sadler 1989), the ultimate developmental tool. Even using it for small, intermittent pieces of work, with tutor produced answer sheets, it is an important means of developing criticality and clarifying criteria and standards.

Sound Standard

The Sound Standard (Cowan 2002, 2006) uses the same process as self-marking and can therefore be considered a sub-category of it. Rather than using an ideal model answer it proves one just above and one below the 55%, which is midway from a pass i.e. 40% and distinction i.e. 70%. The Sound Standard was developed for complex, multi-criterion contexts and targets the understanding of the 'average' piece of work. During a staff development session with secondary teachers in Singapore, the Sound Standard was received enthusiastically by teachers of classes with learning difficulties. They noted that their students were easily discouraged and that this model would be a way of making achievement a reality for them. The same observations apply to Sound Standard as for self-marking.

Standard self-assessment and Learning Contract Design

Learning Contract Design provides students with the freedom to make all curriculum decision, however, the final assessment follows the standard self-assessment model and therefore both will be discussed together (Taras 2014). Generally, tutors are not working with students with this model. With self-marking (and Sound Standard), students may be involved to varying degrees in producing the mark sheet: with the standard model, prior to submission, students are required to provide an assessment of their work linked to the criteria (however decided), and optionally a mark. However much support students may have received from the start to completion of the assessed work, in the form of discussions on criteria, task requirements, rubrics or discussions on initial work plans and

drafts, for the standard self-assessment, students scrutinise their own work without tutor support. Taras (2010) calls it a useful check-list. This effectively separates tutor and student assessment, doubles the tutor work-load and supports tutor-controlled assessment. Possible dialogic discussions could be from entrenched positions since both student and tutor assessments are separated by time and process.

Self-assessment model with integrated peer and tutor feedback

Taras (2001, 2003) developed this model to target feedback on summative, accredited work in HE. Traditionally, final year exams, or end of semester exams, were treated like external exams and not used to provide students with feedback. This model comes into play when all the other models have completed the self-assessment. As the name indicates, student self-assessment takes place when students are sufficiently well informed through peer discussions and feedback (and tutor feedback). Tutor assessments take place as normal within institutional timescales, but students are not informed of this until students re-examine their own work with 'fresh eyes': the same principle occurs at Alverno:

> In order to gain distance from their performance, the students do not assess their own performance until the following class session (Loaker & Jensen 1988: 134)

Students discuss with peers, and carry out peer assessment to encounter alternative models of work. Minimal tutor feedback clarifies outstanding issues before students carry out self-assessment, including grading, and receive full tutor feedback and grade.

> "Interestingly, this study not only shows the benefits of integrating external and internal feedback but it also shows ways of helping students internalise and use tutor feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2005: 208)

Furthermore, it has the added advantage that:

> "…student self-assessment with integrated tutor feedback is one efficient means of helping students overcome unrealistic expectations and focus on their achievement rather than on the input required to produce their work" (Taras 2003: 562)" (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009: 74)

Taras' work and empirical research was originally in language learning (French) in the HE context and then disseminated across faculties, subject areas and skills, and in addition, Dragemark Oscarson uses the same model in secondary schools in Sweden in English language learning with equal success:

> "The present thesis is largely in line with the same set of assumptions and procedural model as Taras' study (2001, 2003) and takes into account the same considerations as A. Brown (2005)" (Dragemark Oscarson, 2009: 75)

This demonstrates the flexibility of the model within widely different contexts and that it can also be used across sectors.

Conclusion

Examples of proven learner and learning-centred, inclusive practice have been available for some time at course, programme and institutional levels. However, having the courage to embrace and implement changes which are true to our discourses and claims, is easier said than done, and is sorely lacking at institutional levels. Bottom up innovations have been demonstrated to have limited impact both in time and in efficacy since they appear counter-current to the institutional thrust (Berry & Adamson 2011).

The great success of the Alverno model (which follows the same process framework as the standard model), would seem to confirm that success is dependent not just on the self-assessment process, but on the level of institutional commitment (Dearing 1997; Berry & Adamson 2011). At Alverno, the commitment at institutional level means that self-assessment permeates all aspects of all courses. It is used for both process and product

assessment. More importantly, it is not just an isolated exercise, but it is integrated into academic life, which helps develop self-assessment into a true life skill.

HE does not seem ready to follow Alverno's example and grasp the nettle of self-assessment as a full institutional commitment, but perhaps it is ready to support and encourage its staff to adopt a more limited and interim solution which supports and encourages students to understand and become part of the assessment community. Understanding the issues is a good starting point and perhaps in time self-assessment will find the true place it deserves, particularly in HE.

Much research remains to be done to add to our understanding of self-assessment. The impacts of different assessment processes on students of different levels of proficiency would be useful to educators, as would the different perceptions and reactions of both students and tutors to each of the five models identified by Taras (2010, 2014). Research also needs to be expanded and unified both within and outside the Anglophone contexts to provide a more accurate overview of current realities. Continued research across sectors can increase our understanding of discourses and practices and by continual sharing, we can benefit across cultures, languages and continents.

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Author

Taras, Maddalena (maddalena.taras@sunderland.ac.uk).

Faculty of Education and Society. University of Sunderland. Forster Building. Chester Road. Sunderland SR1 3SD.

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