

# Mapping and Interrogating Assessment Practices

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## Overview of presentation

- Project overview
- Project findings
- Project implications
- Possible discussion points

## Project Overview

- 2004 Central Queensland University Teaching and Learning Grant
- **Project title:** “Mapping and Interrogating Assessment Practices and Instruments in Central Queensland University’s Undergraduate Distance and Online Courses: Preparing the Way for Benchmarking and Quality Assurance”
- **Acknowledgments:** The researchers are grateful to the participating academics, to the members of the project’s reference group and to Linda Seabrook for transcribing the interview tapes.

## Project Overview (Continued)

- **Intended outcomes:**
  - **to map current assessment practices and tasks** in CQU’s undergraduate distance and online courses (Phase One);
  - **to conduct a theoretically informed interrogation** of those assessment practices and tasks, framed by CQU’s strategic documents and contemporary ‘best practice’ in the assessment of adult learning (Phase Two);
  - **to provide participating academics with a practical and research-informed framework** for their subsequent action in evaluating and refining

their assessment practices and tasks (Phase Three);

- **to present a set of recommendations for linking those assessment practices and tasks** to ACODE's national benchmarking project of Australian universities' distance and electronic learning programs (Phase Four).

## **Project Overview (Continued)**

- **Research questions:**

- In what ways are the tasks perceived as celebrating student diversity and promoting democratic understandings of students and academics?
- To what extent are the tasks and their institutional context seen as facilitating accountability by and surveillance of students and academics?

## **Project Overview (Continued)**

- **Data gathering and analysis:**

- five course profiles from five schools and three faculties were selected and examined
- 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted by the three researchers with 20 academics who had taught undergraduate distance and/or online courses in Winter Term 2004 and who represented five faculties and one division and two Central Queensland campuses.
- interview questions ranged from influences on selecting particular assessment items to procedures for changing summative assessment requirements to links among course objectives, content and assessment to implications of and for generic skills and graduate attributes to knowledge of content management system
- course profiles and interview transcripts were analysed using discourse and textual analysis techniques.

## **Project Overview (Continued)**

- **Conceptual framework:**

- Tension between education's and assessment's roles in facilitating individual and community empowerment (Friere, 1973) and in enacting social stratification and marginalisation (Bourdieu, 1973)
- Tension between quality as a means of rendering assessment in Australian universities meaningful and productive (James, McInnis & Devlin, 2002) and standardised testing as the means of constructing learners (and teachers) as 'governable persons' (Graham & Neu, 2004)
- Link between types of assessment and assumptions about knowledge

construction and communication (e.g., reproductivist, constructivist and transformative)

## **Project Overview (Continued)**

- **Project presentations and publications:**
  - Harreveld, R. E., Moore, T. G., & Danaher, P. A. (Eds.) (in preparation). *Evaluating assessment: Issues and strategies in assessing learning in university courses and programs*. Proposed theme issue of *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*. Preliminary proposal accepted 'in principle' and detailed proposal currently being prepared.
  - Harreveld, R. E., Moore, T. G., & Danaher, P. A. (2005, August 8). Mapping and interrogating assessment practices. Paper to be presented in the Central Queensland University Teaching and Learning seminar series, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton and Toowoomba, Qld
  - Moore, T. G., Harreveld, R. E., & Danaher, P. A. (2005, April 13). Australian university academics' undergraduate distance and online course assessment tasks: Educational quality versus institutional governmentality. Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Ritz Carlton Hotel, Montreal, Canada.

## **Project Findings**

- Five course profiles analysed
- Humanities, Engineering, Education, Social work & Health
- Mapped similarities and differences
  - Educational
    - Individual tasks reflected pedagogical assumptions about pacing of learning and assessment
  - Bureaucratic
    - Standardised format and word count reflected increasing bureaucratisation and regimentation

## **Project findings (continued)**

- Relationships
  - Links between individual assessment tasks and specific course outcomes
  - Links between assessment tasks across courses within programs
  - Links between tasks and external drivers such as the Australian Standards codes.
- In some cases there was an effective curriculum, pedagogical and assessment alignment

## **Project findings (continued)**

- There was also a dominance of information literacy, generic skills, graduate attributes and authentic 'real world' learning and assessment
- Adds to increasing list of hurdles that students and academics must jump to fulfil course requirements
- Leading to increasing surveillance and accountability of students and

academics

- Effect of which is to narrow and homogenise assessment tasks and responses.

## **Project findings (continued)**

- Interviews
  - Highlighted concerns for student welfare and success
  - Implicit commitment to celebrating student diversity
  - Institutional pressures and constraints
  - The need to negotiate a complex array of factors and forces in designing implementing and evaluating assessment tasks.
- The study linked the mapping of assessment tasks to the perceptions of assessment by the participating academics.

## **Assessment Clearing House**

- Electronic catalogue of scholarly, peer-reviewed & published journal articles, conference papers & book chapters that have been produced by CQU academics over the last 'x' years.
- Invite lecturers to place their work with full copyright clearances as per course resources online requirements.

## **Staff Assessment Support Service**

- Volunteers from across all discipline areas to work 1:1 or 1:small group
- Provide a mentoring, collegial support to colleagues embarking on assessment development as part of new or old course and/or program review processes

## **For Students – Frequently Asked Questions about Assessment**

- Establish an online hotline for students: FAQs about Assessment
- Develop the question content from a series of focus groups conducted with undergraduate and postgraduate students from all campuses of the University (including the international campuses)

- Develop the answers from a similar process using focus groups of lecturers from the particular discipline and program areas from which the questions emerge

## **2006 Teaching and Learning Showcase: Assessment Insights**

- Invite lecturers who participated in this study to be part of an 'Assessment Insights' forum e.g. *'Hot Topics or Issues in Assessment at CQU'*.
- Prior to the showcase, invite all University staff to send in their topics/issues that they wish analysed and discussed.
- The study participants meet with a facilitator to determine those that will be addressed and in what ways
- Key people both internal and external to the University are then invited to join the study participants in a Forum that could be managed similar that on the SBS Insight program.

## **Ongoing Professional Learning**

- From the Assessment Insights session, develop an online video-streamed professional learning module
- Incorporate the module as part of the Staff Induction & Orientation program
- Use the module as the basis for developing a course on Assessment in Higher Education for all staff – as either informal professional learning or with negotiated credit into a postgraduate program

## **Rationale**

- Raise awareness of issues
- Clarify understandings of LMS & assessment options using new technologies
- Utilises & contributes academics individual & collective professional learning about assessment
- Value lived experiences & knowledges of staff and students
- Can be updated regularly by practitioners
- Benchmark university performance & processes

## **Benchmarking**

- Comparing one's performance with one's peers
- Collecting information about an aspect of the university in a way that enables comparisons to be made & identify improvements needed

(Fielden, 1997,

<http://www.acu.ac.uk/chems/onlinepublications/930914591.pdf>)

- The National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) (1995): *"the purpose of benchmarking is to provide managers with an external point of reference or standard for evaluating the quality and cost of their organisation's internal activities, practices and processes"*

### **Benchmarking (Continued)**

- CQU is likely to need to demonstrate the comparability between its teaching and learning mission and objectives and those of other Australian universities.
- The “development of performance indicators and benchmarking” (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000, p. 3) is a critical part of establishing such comparability.
- “It is in the interest of higher education to be able to present evidence systematically on the ways in which” such issues as “student attrition rates” “are being addressed” (Skilbeck & Connell, 2000, p. 3).

### **Benchmarking (Continued)**

- The Australasian Council on Open, Distance and E-Learning (ACODE) has initiated a project in the area of benchmarking e-learning and online learning (<http://www.acode.edu.au/projects/benchmarking.htm>, retrieved August 6, 2005).
- Focus on institutional infrastructure, course development, quality assurance, teaching and learning, course structures, student support, faculty support and evaluation and assessment.
- In 2004, trial using a framework developed by the Universities of Melbourne and Tasmania involved seven Australian universities

### **Possible Discussion Points**

- In what ways can and should assessment tasks celebrate student diversity and promote democratic understandings of students and academics?
- To what extent can and should assessment tasks facilitate accountability by and surveillance of students and

academics?

- Which forms of knowledge and assumptions about knowledge construction are linked with particular kinds of assessment task?

### **Possible Discussion Points (Continued)**

- Which suggested assessment initiatives are worth pursuing at CQU?
- What are the possibilities, pros and cons of CQU's involvement in (inter)national assessment benchmarking?

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**Thank you for participating!**

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