A GUIDE TO **ASSESSING IN-CLASS GROUP PRESENTATIONS** IN TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

The spoken word is written on the soul of the hearer with understanding, and the written word is only a pale shadow of the living and animate speech of a man with knowledge.
(Plato, Phaedrus, p. 98).

Assessed in-class group presentation on a prepared topic or a project report is a common form of oral assessment. In transnational education inter-cultural student teams may be formed across sites and these teams may present their work as part of the assessment procedures. The use of communication technologies such as videoconference, google hangouts, skype and adobe connect to enable cross-site interaction has been trialled in some programs.

Groups presenting their work can be a challenge where group members are in geographically different places. To take advantage of the possibilities for inter-cultural learning the ideal team would have student members from both sites, however having students from both sites giving a presentation by videoconference presents difficulties. More commonly the groups are inter-cultural but the actual presentations are by sub-groups of students at each site. The presentations are often recorded and uploaded so that they can be shared across sites.

Group presentations, whether assessed or not, can heighten student engagement in the work being reported while developing group and presentation skills. In the transnational context students may also develop skills in effectively communicating in virtual environments and develop inter-cultural understandings.

Oral assessment

Oral assessment has been reported as useful in developing students' applied problem-solving skills, capacity to think on their feet, and application of knowledge to real or hypothetical situations. Oral assessment can judge knowledge and understanding and abilities such as problem solving. Oral assessment can motivate students to prepare well and thus develop a thorough understanding of the topic. Oral assessment allows probing of the depth and extent of a student's knowledge, for example, by questioning students about aspects of research underlying the presented material.

This is not necessarily the case for a prepared in-class presentation however. Depending on requirements a presentation might be quite superficial, for example, simply reporting what has been read and presenting the information visually as dot points, or reading a written paper aloud. Requiring a high degree of structure may lessen the opportunities for students to apply and develop their skills and reduce the capacity to ask probing and/or unpredictable questions. Yet students often need a more or less predictable structure to allow them to plan and reduce unnecessary anxiety and a specific format or structure can increase the reliability of the assessment task across the cohort.

One of the strengths of oral assessment [is] its ability to distinguish superficial from real knowledge through in-depth questioning.
(Kehm, 2001cited in Joughin, 2009)

Unless specified the level of interaction between presenter and audience can range from a one-way presentation to a completely dialogic discussion between student and group. It is therefore important to ensure fairness across groups by discussing with students:

- how the presenter is expected to interact with the student group

- what role the group will be asked to play in observing the presentation

- the provision of feedback and the assessment criteria.

Some advantages of assessing in-class group presentations

All assessment practices have their advantages and disadvantages. Some advantages of assessing in-class group presentation include the following.

- Oral assessment may offer a high degree of validity as it provides the opportunity for students to fully demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

- Students are able to develop their confidence and public communication skills.

  Written and oral assessment tasks place great demands on students' English language skills, and this may put some students whose first language is not English at a disadvantage. Where these assessment tasks are used, consideration might be given to providing students with early feedback on their language skills, providing support for those who require language development assistance and articulating how language issues are to be dealt with in the grading process. (University of Wollongong Good Practice Assessment Guidelines 2004)

Some disadvantages of assessing in-class group presentation include the following.

- Anxiety may result from unfamiliarity with the dominant cultural norms around presentation.

- Offshore and onshore students' English language skills and confidence may not be equivalent.

- Students with hearing or speech difficulties need support.

- Students more experienced in presenting may have an advantage.

- Lack of anonymity may bias results.

Reliability and fairness

Fairness entails both an absence of bias and an equal opportunity for students to develop and demonstrate their abilities and knowledge. This is important given the varying levels of student confidence in public speaking.

Fairness is supported by having teachers from both sites review the assessment criteria for language or cultural bias, and being mutually involved in

assessing the presentations. Providing a degree of structure such as a presentation template and procedure increases reliability of the assessment. Discussing and trialling the assessment rubric with students across sites also increases reliability.

Self and peer assessment

Self assessment means learning to evaluate the quality of one's own work which is a critical graduate attribute. Self assessment of oral presentations often provides opportunities for students to critically reflect on their work and identify specific strengths and areas for improvement.

Peers may not be involved in grading but they can play an important role in providing peer feedback. Checklists are sometimes used for this purpose so that students can focus on the critical aspects and clarify their comments in writing before giving verbal feedback. Students are then able to reflect on the written feedback sheets after the event.

Where possible student involvement in the creation of the marking scheme can encourage a deeper understanding of the assessment process.

Marking and grading

Assessment design should be responsive to students' context such as multiple curricula, different study environments and different cultural contexts. (University of Wollongong Good Practice Assessment Guidelines 2004)

A marking rubric provides assessors with a common reference point for their judgments. It also provides a basis for peer feedback, helping students to understand the nature of good work and to evaluate the quality of their own and other's work.

In co-developing criteria and rubrics across sites, it is important to focus the assessment on the intended learning outcomes for the subject. If the learning outcomes do not include the development of presentation skills, and if these are not taught, the assessment of presentation skills becomes questionable.

Preparing students for in-class presentations

Transnational teachers can support students in learning how to design and give an effective presentation.

- Show and discuss examples of presentations on video, eg from youtube.

- Model presentation skills.

- Provide opportunities for short practice presentation activities with time for discussion, feedback and using the assessment rubric.

- Provide clear written information about the assessment and spend time discussing this in class.

- Use peer evaluation and feedback to help students become familiar with criteria and standards.

- Build in opportunities that require frequent speaking in class, eg, short talks, focused QandA.

Designing assessment tasks for learning

From Good Practice Assessment - UOW Guidelines

Regardless of location, the design of assessment tasks for learning relies on the same principles.

- Assessment needs to be primarily about learning rather than grading, and should offer a holistic rather than a fragmented experience.

- Students learn more from tasks that engage them in creating responses, rather than replicating answers.

- Authentic, real-life problems help students transform learning into practice and underpin their transition into professions.

- Students need to be active agents in their own learning. For example, by finding ways to allow them to initiate aspects of tasks rather than merely responding to instructions and prompts for students to succeed, they need to develop a capacity to judge their work which is similar to that of their teacher – feedback and opportunities to evaluate samples of work are critical.

Bias can occur when obviously irrelevant factors such as ethnicity or class affect and examiners judgement, when questions or cases favour one group of students such as scenarios based on a single country, when the language is not the first language for a group of students.
(Joughin 2010)

From the literature

- Assessment involves intense student effort and engages their emotions and motivations. It needs to be primarily about learning rather than grading, and should offer a holistic rather than a fragmented experience (Boud, 2009).

- Students learn more from tasks that engage them in creating responses, rather than replicating answers (Joughin, 2009).

- For students to succeed, they need to develop a capacity to judge their work which is similar to that of their teacher – feedback and opportunities to evaluate samples of work are critical (Sadler, 2009).

- Encountering unfamiliar assessment tasks can be a demotivating experience if the stakes are too high (Dochy, 2007).

- Authentic, real-life problems help students transform learning into practice and underpin their transition into professions (Boud, 2009).

Key reference

Much of the material above has been adapted from:

Joughin, Gordon (2010). *A short guide to oral assessment.* Leeds Metropolitan University and University of Wollongong. http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/staff/files/100317_36668_ShortGuideOralAssess1_WEB.pdf

References

Boud, D. (2009). How can practice reshape assessment? In *Assessment, learning and judgement in higher education*. G. Joughin (Ed.). London, Springer: 29-43.

Dochy, F., M. Segers, et al. (2007). Assessment engineering: breaking down barriers between teaching and learning, and assessment. In *Rethinking assessment in higher education : learning for the longer term.* (D. Boud and N. Falchikov (Eds.). Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, Routledge.

Joughin, G. (2009). *Assessment, learning and judgement in higher education.* G. Joughin (Ed.). London, Springer.

O'Donaghue, T. (2010). *Principles to assist in Quality Assurance.* ALTC report (2010). http://www.education.uwa.edu.au/research/frameworks/principles.

Sadler, D.R. (2009). Transforming holistic assessment and grading into a vehicle for complex learning. In G. Joughin (ed.) *Assessment, learning and judgement in higher education.* Dordrecht: Springer. (Ch. 4, pp. 45-63).

Sanderson, G., S. Yeo, et al. (2010). *Interpretations of Comparability and Equivalence around Assessment: Views of Academic Staff in Transnational Education.* ALTC.

University of Wollongong (2004). *Good Practice Assessment Guidelines.* http://www.uow.edu.au/about/policy/UOW058614.html

Professional Development Principles

A set of professional development principles for transnational teaching teams informed, and were refined through, the work of the participatory action learning groups in this project.

The principles can be accessed at: transnationalteachingteams.org

Transnational Teaching Teams

Professional development for quality enhancement of learning and teaching

For further information please contact:

Associate Professor Geraldine Lefoe
Learning, Teaching and Curriculum
University of Wollongong
Email: glefoe@uow.edu.au

Dr Lynne Keevers
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Wollongong
Email: lkeevers@uow.edu.au

Developed by Maureen Bell