Moderation for Fair Assessment in Transnational Learning and Teaching

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Project partners

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Focus

• Preliminary findings from a research study on moderation of assessment in TNE involving Australian universities and their offshore partner institutions.
• Fills a gap in literature on TNE practices.
• From perspective of TNE academics and professional staff as well as those in Australia – redresses imbalance.

Transnational Higher Education (TNE)

• “in which learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based” (UNESCO and Council of Europe 2001:1 cited in McBurnie and Ziguras 2007:22).

• The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) identified that assessment of student learning and moderation in particular are key components of quality assurance (Carroll and Woodhouse, 2006).
Literature

- The principle promoted to Australian universities to ensure quality and sustainability is one of ‘equivalence’ or ‘comparability’ between onshore and offshore provision (Connelly et al., 2006, DEST, 2005).

- The literature provides generalised advice on assessment in transnational education programs, such as the use of marking guides by offshore staff (Castle and Kelly, 2004), but studies on how assessment and moderation activities are being conducted are lacking.

Methodology

- Two year project.
- Mixed Methods approach.
- Interviews – Australian universities x 3, TNE partners (up to 9).
- Online survey of all Australian universities, and selected TNE partners.
- Collection of assessment policies, instruments, guidelines.
- Culminating in Toolkit and Glossary.
This research

• 25 TNE academics and professional staff.
• 29 Australian academics and professional staff.
• One third of Australian staff held course leaders and subject co-ordination roles.
• Business/Management, Social Sciences and Engineering.
• 1 x branch campus, 2 x educational partnerships.

Moderation, consistency, comparability

• Validity, reliability, consistency ... just making sure that in assessing what you want to assess and you are being fair to students in various classes over time and across locations

• Moderation is a process where we are looking for equivalence between cohorts; no one is advantaged or disadvantaged. It’s a form of quality control.
Broader concept

‘Moderation is not an end product. The process starts at the beginning developing the skills and abilities of the tutors, developing the partner to mark in line with our university’s standards. It is about consistent agreement, not scaling’.

Broader still

• ‘Pre-moderation is Quality Assurance - a degree of fairness in assessment - those who set and mark know exactly what they and the students are meant to be doing and have the skills to pass judgment on someone else’s work. Post-moderation is Quality Control - making sure that the marking is done in line with the philosophy of the course and in line with the learning objectives at the right level of difficulty’.
Different Views

• Curriculum and assessment should be identical to ensure equity among students – ‘mirroring’.

• Curriculum and assessment should be comparable, linked to the learning objectives and assessing the same skills and knowledge.

However... the realities

• Teaching and marking across cultures.

• Whole of subject approach.

• Relationship building and trust.

• Communication with staff and students.
Moderation in Practice – ‘Post’ Processes

• Curriculum and assessment designed in Australia many months before delivery.
• Variable Structure – e.g. marking guides, exemplars.
• Variable Processes – e.g. % marked in Australia and feedback given, all marking done at TNE institution then sent to Australia.
• Use of exams to scale marks back.
• Post-marking scaling.

Issues – Partner Perspective of Australian staff

• Being checked up on.
• Lack of role definition.
• Lack of clarity of what support is provided.
• Great variability in type of communication and support from Australia.
• Delays in moderation feedback.
• Lack of specificity in moderation feedback or none at all.
Issues – Australian perspective of Partner staff

• Lenient marking – loose referencing, plagiarism.
• Not marking to full scale of marks – nobody fails.
• Only summative (mark) feedback, not formative.
• Teaching to the exam.
• Delays in marking, sending scripts.

The Tension

• TRUST – being recognised as professionals, being included in curriculum and assessment decision making, relationship building.

• CONTROL – ensuring standards are maintained, satisfying quality audit, relationship building.
Comparability

• Exactly the same?
• Flexibility to accommodate local needs within carefully defined parameters?
• Will any flexibility put at risk the validity of standards espoused by the Australian university?

If you want to add your Voice...


Takes 10 minutes.

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