

# Why Design Thinking Works for Learning Growth?



## ACTION RESEARCH GRANT (AGR) – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assessment is a topic that has long evoked debate and discussion for all involved in education. Assessment *of* learning has traditionally been the way teachers collect and analyse information to make sense of student progress against an established standard. Moving through the 21st century, a greater focus has been placed on assessment *for* learning and its influential role in measuring learning growth in education.

Seemingly, the focus of this small school-based study is to make sense of the purpose of assessment in schools in 2018 and beyond, through the voice of students. The questions I have been trying to make sense of are, How will developmental rubrics impact student learning? What metrics will be used to measure impact? How will educators define learning in order too accurately measure impact?

Patrick Griffin, Chair of Education (Assessment) at the University of Melbourne (2009), alongside his work with a team of researchers to develop a model of assessment for teaching, provided a research precedent for this study. Griffin states that assessment must inform teaching and that when used effectively, teachers can use it to effectively monitor student learning and accurately scaffold tasks based on the students' current level of learning on their continuum.

The data was collected from Year 8 English and Humanities students rather than my own classes, which was implemented to reduce potential bias in the student responses. Strategically, the Year 8 English and Humanities classes were taught by the Heads of Department, who were supportive of the research study. The data was collected within a 10-week term timeline through Data Collection Method - Qualitative: Staff and student feedback - online Survey. Students were selected at random, where all participants had the opportunity to opt in or out with every stage of the research project.

Two key Themes to emerge:

### 1. Student focus on Marks/Grades

The term 'mark' or 'marks' appeared a total of 54 times in the student responses particularly when students were asked, "What's the first part of the rubric the student looks at and why?" It was predicted prior to this research, based on my own anecdotal evidence, that students would look to their total grade or percentage first before reading the comments outlining improvement feedback. This prediction has been supported within the evidence presented in the study. All students eluded to the fact that the first thing they looked at was the percentage score. This supports the current education culture of praising A – E grades and percentage-based assessment tasks, rather than feedback comments to improve learning. There is an ever-increasing amount of research literature that backs the reality that A – E grades provide little to no detail on the strengths and weaknesses of that students (Gonski, 2018: 30). Masters (2018) states that a long-term picture of how learning occurs in practice can lead to a situation where a student who receives a 'D' year after year, is perceived as making no progress at all when, in reality, the student might be making as much annual improvement as a student who consistently receives an 'A'.

### 2. Rubric of limited value?

Data that emerged and was not predicted at the commencement of the study, was the fact that rubrics could potentially stifle creativity. Student B had an interesting interpretation on what he feels is the purpose of rubrics. He states that they set out what you can do. You can't be as creative. You have to follow the criteria instead of just going along with it. Student AH stated that rubrics sound robotic, they analyse characters in relation to themes and sometimes you don't need that, there's always an exception. You could make a point that you don't need a rubric. Through my four years of teaching, I had never considered that providing a tool to gain evidence of learning, would in fact potentially stop or slow down the creativity of students wishing to be more creative It was found that 80% of students had not shown or could not remember showing a rubric from an assessment task to a parent/ guardian.

## Implications

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A significant implication that has emerged from the study, relates to how rubric students can be educated on how rubrics support their learning and can result in improved outcomes. Literature points towards the ever growing and easily overlooked skill of self-assessment. Anecdotally, I have sat in on meetings and overheard numerous teachers make the assumption that self-assessment is an inherent skill that all students possess and that they don't need to be taught or continually reminded on how best to use a rubric to reflect on their learning.

The research suggests strongly that self-assessment needs to be explicitly taught to students. It's evident from the student responses that there is a general sense of ambiguity from teachers, regarding the necessity of providing students with both a task descriptor and rubric at the commencement of the assessment. Furthermore, it is important that schools provide staff with expert professional learning on the purpose, design and evaluation of effective rubrics that enhance student learning, as developmental rubrics contribute significantly to the transformation of assessment practice.

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## References

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