

Using a Triad based structure to Peer Review Assessment Rubrics in Business

Peter Grainger *

School of Education,
University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia
Email: peter.grainger@usc.edu.au

*Correspondence Author

David Fleischman

Business School
Faculty of Arts, Business and Law,
University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia

Dawn Birch

Business School
Faculty of Arts, Business and Law,
University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia

Abstract

Assessment is a key driver for engagement and a widely criticised aspect of the tertiary student experience. In regard to assessment, in particular, feedback, rubrics and peer review have been major focuses for researchers in recent years. This research utilised an innovative peer review process in a triad structure to evaluate and improve assessment rubrics in a business course at a regional university in Australia. Data from interviews with academics and students was analysed using a recognised 10 question framework to evaluate the quality of the rubrics used in the course. The results indicated the 10 question framework was a useful tool to evaluate the quality of the rubrics. In addition, the process of peer review of assessment artefacts, in a triad structure improved assessment literacies of the participating academics, improved accountability evidence, and led to greater staff and student satisfaction due to improved assessment experiences. This research contributes to new knowledge due to its focuses on assessment rubrics, the efficacy of the 10 question framework as a reviewing mechanism and the use of academic triads to review assessment and not teaching performance.

Key words: *Peer review of assessment, triad structure, School of Business, community of practice, quality assurance.*

JEL Classification: I21

PsycINFO Classification: 3550

FoR Code: 1301; 1303

ERA Journal ID#: 35696

Introduction

Assessment, for students, is a key driver for engagement in tertiary education courses and a widely criticised aspect of the overall student experience nationally and internationally. Student engagement is driven by successful assessment experiences (Boud and Associates 2010) and shaped by the clarity of assessment rubrics (Grainger & Weir, 2016). As a sector wide response researchers have, in more recent times focussed on the nature of feedback, specifically feedback uptake by students, the creation of environments by academics and the active role of students as agents in the feedback process (Carless & Boud, 2018; Carless, 2019a, 2019b; Henderson et al, 2019; Dawson et al, 2019; Malecka et al 2020; Mercader et al, 2020; Carless & Winstone, 2020; Winstone et al, 2020; Winstone & Boud, 2020).

Assessment rubrics have also been the focus of researchers in more recent years (Grainger & Weir, 2020, Dawson, 2017, Panadero & Jonsson, 2013), driven by a desire to provide more clarity for students in terms of the guidance rubrics can provide students when interpreting achievement standards. Research has shown that rubrics provide students with a blueprint for submissions, an additional feedback mechanism, a mechanism for self and peer assessment and a facilitator of self-regulation (Grainger, 2015).

A third focus for researchers is increasingly on peer review, viewed as a valid quality assurance mechanism in an increasing era of accountability in higher education nationally and internationally. Peer review of teaching, especially for promotional purposes, is now common practice at many universities in Australia (Grainger et al, 2014; Booth et al, 2016). However, peer review of assessment, used to benchmark like courses across tertiary institutions, can be considered a relatively new practice. Finally, peer review of assessment rubrics utilising a Triad structure is an innovation in tertiary education. A review of the literature failed to reveal any research that reported peer review of assessment in a triad based structure in a business discipline.

The project upon which this research is based, aimed to utilise a peer review process to evaluate assessment practices, including rubrics, of AQF Level 7 undergraduate courses in teacher education, business, visual arts, occupational therapy and outdoor education. This article reports on the results of this project in an undergraduate business course at a regional university on Australia. The Triad structure was modelled on a Triad based peer review of teaching mechanism operating at Griffith University in Brisbane (Grainger, Bridgstock, Houston & Drew, 2015). The Triad included an 'expert' and two self-identified peers who worked collaboratively as a mini community of practice, to improve assessment practices, including construction of assessment rubrics over the course of two semesters. A feature of the project was the design, which included capturing the student voice, in relation to the perceived efficacy of the rubric which was improved as a result of the triad discussions and implemented with students.

The focus on using reflective practice to change practice, enabled multiple professional learning opportunities for internal moderation practices, better student outcomes, improved accountability evidence, and greater staff and student satisfaction due to improved assessment experiences. Utilising a peer review process to evaluate the quality of rubrics has the potential to lead to enhanced stakeholder understandings of assessment due to the engagement required and the development of 'agency', thereby building capacity and ensuring sustainability.

Literature Review

Research on rubric use in higher education is increasing (Dawson 2017) and several major reviews of the use of rubrics in higher education have been forthcoming in the past decade (e.g. Brookhart, 2018; Brookhart & Chen, 2014; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Bell, Mladenovic & Price, 2013). Rubrics are significant quality assurance instruments, used by assessors to grade student work, used by assessors when moderating student work, used by students as a guide to submitting assessment tasks and used by students, post marking, as a feedback mechanism (Grainger & Weir, 2020). There are many terms used to describe rubrics (grading tools, criteria sheets, marking guides, scoring sheets, guides to making judgment, rating scales, checklists) and hence many definitions of rubrics but for the purpose of this research the following definition captures the three essential elements of all rubrics.

a rubric is defined as a template for presenting the assessable elements of a task (the criteria for marking) and a description of the degree of quality (or standard descriptor) expected for each criterion across a range of achievement standards (Weir, 2020).

Typically rubrics are characterised by three elements: criteria, standards and standards descriptors. Criteria describe what is to be judged by assessors; standards describe a level of achievement (e.g. High Distinction, Distinction, Credit, Pass, and Fail) and standards descriptors describe what a student is expected to do to achieve a certain standard. The description of quality identified in each of the standards is matched against evidence in student work, which can be a problematic exercise if the quality described is vague, subjective, fuzzy, or not capable of being evidenced in student work. This can result in inconsistency in grading and significantly impact moderation process (Grainger & Weir, 2016).

Rubrics are not only used by assessors to grade student work, they are used by students as a guide for completion of assessment tasks (Grainger & Weir, 2020) because rubrics indicate the assessment expectations, that is, what assessors are looking for and the quality or degree of the learning performance. Rubrics are also used by teams of assessors during moderation processes for the purpose of calibration when assessors make judgments about student work and compare them in order to ensure consistent, valid and reliable judgments.

To summarise:

Assessors and students are impacted prior to grading as they engage with the rubric and deconstruct its meanings. Assessors are impacted at the point of grading as the rubric is used to match evidence of student work with standards and standards descriptors. Assessors are also impacted during the moderation process which uses the rubric to ensure consistency of judgments, and finally, students are impacted post grading when they receive results and guidance in the form of feedback via the rubric (Grainger & Weir, 2020).

Despite the increasing emphasis on assessment practices in higher education in the past decade, and more recently, a focus on the use of rubrics, "there is a dearth of empirical research on the quality of rubrics as assessment instruments" (Humphry & Heldsinger, 2014, p. 254). There is also a tacit assumption that assessors know how to create quality rubrics but this is not always the case, as evidenced by Humphry and Heldsinger (2014) who stated that that many rubrics actually compromise, inadvertently, the integrity of the assessor's judgment.

The major issue with rubrics is the vagueness of vocabulary used to write criteria and in particular the fuzziness of standards descriptors which describe the qualities or the behavior that a student needs to demonstrate to achieve a standard.

An aspect of rubric research that has not been adequately documented is their design (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013) and the impact this has on student rubric literacy, nor the process by which they are constructed (Reddy & Andrade, 2010). Designing a quality rubric is a complex and time consuming task, Dawson's 2017 framework in fact, identifies as many as 14 design dimensions all of which are significant contributors to the quality of the rubric. Grainger and Weir (2015) identified an alternative design to the traditional matrix style of criteria sheet, known as the Continua model of a guide to making judgments, a major characteristic being the aspect of nestedness, which ensures that only the defining quality of each standard, the discernible or discriminating difference(s), is identified for each descriptor. The nested characteristic ensures that only the defining/discriminating behaviors are identified and that the A standard assumes the student exhibits C standard and B standard behaviors even though they are not identified in the rubric.

Grainger (2020) reported on positive student reactions to the nested aspect of rubrics noting that students liked the nested aspect in particular the focus on not repeating descriptions of behavior, thereby ensuring the "convoluted" nature of wordy criteria sheets (with repeated behaviors across different standards) is avoided. As recent research into the nested aspect of rubrics is virtually nonexistent, it is a focus for this project, reported here.

In regards to the literature describing this, as noted earlier, there is a dearth of research. Similarly, there is a paucity of research in regards to the evaluation of assessment artefacts, (ie rubrics) using a Triad structure and hence the value of the research findings presented here in this study. In addition, student responses to the clarity of rubrics have rarely been researched. The research questions guiding this study were aimed at filling a gap in the literature by analyzing the process of evaluating rubrics in the Triad structure using a 10 question framework, the positives of participating in this research from the point of view of assessors and finally, reporting on the student voice in regard to the clarity of rubrics they are engaging with in a Business context.

Method

The conceptual framework for the study is based on a sociocultural view of learning as mediated practice. Lave and Wenger (1990) identify the concept of 'situated learning' as learning that is embedded within contexts, culture and activity. The purpose of this study was to examine ways, via Triads, that participants can engage in the critique of assessment tasks and rubrics within the current context and culture of higher education assessment. Utilising an Action Research Approach, a cyclic, participative and reflective process of problem solving, working with business academics in a Triad, facilitated a "community of practice" to improve assessment practices especially rubrics.

Discussion/interview with Triad participants and students was the principal data gathering method. Participation in the project was voluntary. There were multiple phases: evaluating an existing assessment task and rubric through a focus group structure involving the Triad; rewriting an existing rubric to ensure constructive alignment and standards based on the feedback; trialling the improved rubric and evaluating the improved rubric through follow up Triad based focus group discussion with business academics and students, centred on how the improved rubric impacted assessment processes. This Triad process was completed over two semesters to enable the final phase to occur. The Triad met three times, discussion facilitated by the Project

leader, also the author of this article. Discussions, with both academics and students were recorded and analysed for themes by the project leader, confirmed by other triad members. A total of three hours of recording were analysed. Two students were interviewed by the Project Leader, each lasted approximately 30 minutes.

A 10 question framework (Christie et al, 2015) was used as a document to facilitate discussions about the quality of the rubric. The course chosen for the review was a first year course, introduction to marketing part of a Bachelor of Business degree. The framework asked questions about the language of the rubric (see Appendix).

In addition to the three team Triad discussions, a one day workshop was attended by the Triad Leader, discussion were recorded and analysed for themes. Prior to the workshop the Triad Leader, completed a survey which was used to frame the workshop discussions. These data are also presented in the section below.

Results

Triad discussions as a team

Analysis of the transcripts revealed the process involved the team members developing an understanding of the underlying premises of the approach to the development of a nested rubric. A number of iterations of the rubric were discussed before agreement on the assessment criteria and standard descriptors to be used in the new rubric. The nested rubric was discussed in a pre-semester meeting with the teaching team to ensure the approach and the rubric was understood by all. It was generally well-received. The major discussion point has been the aspect of 'nestedness'. The main point of discussion was the aspect of a nested rubric, which was foreign to the Triad participants. The conclusion was that the new rubric needed to be accompanied by a detailed guide as a supporting document. Representative feedback comments were as follows:

I found the nested rubric easy to use and understand. I hadn't used one before, but it was a very quick and easy adjustment once the point or idea behind the rubric was explained. I think students understood it as well, although the task was accompanied by a guide that explained the kind of content (which concepts should be applied and how for example) that should be included in each report section. I think that approach worked very well. The rubric told students how the report would be graded and the guide told the students what should be included. I think a guide and rubric together work well in general, as it eliminates the temptation to include elements in the rubric that say 'what' students need to include in an assessment, rather than 'how' they will be marked. I think if only the rubric was provided, students would have been confused.

As per (name) comments the rubric for (course ID) is fit for purpose and easy to explain to first year students in terms of the graduated responses (nestedness) and how this equated to the mark they could achieve. That said, and based on being involved in the research work into rubrics with (name), my thoughts are that these should be reviewed every semester in terms of language and requirements, and also getting insights from students if we are going to take an engagement approach to see how they are conceiving what is required based on the language used. So, asking students their understanding of what separates analysis from evaluation from discussion in order to frame these statements effectively would be of value. It's important to give first year students a good sense of what is required, and at the same time make it achievable - that is the sense they can do well based on the descriptors in the rubrics and the (course ID) rubric did that last semester. As (name) notes the guide in (course name) is important for AT3 - for those students attending class and looking for guidance they are really getting bang for their buck - so to speak.

Individual student discussions

Discussions were conducted by the Project leader (author) with two students from the Business school who had been enrolled in the course. These were conducted after the course had completed. These sessions were recorded and analysed for themes. The same 10 question framework was used to guide discussions as well as other questions that arose during the discussion. In addition, dialogic discussions with students were implemented by the Triad participants. That data is included in the comments made by the Triad Leader presented in the next section. Data in the following section pertains just to the discussions conducted by the author with the two high achieving Business students. Themes that were discussed included the value of in-class discussions; the significance of criteria sheets; the clarity of wording used on criteria sheets; nestedness; clarity and clutter, support materials in the form of a guide.

Table 1:
Themes and comments from student participants

Theme	Representative comments from students
In-class discussion	<p><i>So I remember there was one little unclear bit where it was Business to business, like a good business to business, we didn't know whether we were focusing on that, rather than business to consumer. But I think it's been refined since and we've discussed it in class and it ended up that we're able to do the whole collective which is nice because that opened up a lot of venues to incorporate into the marketing mix, and talk about the different promotions that they offer. And that also opened up the geographical. So that helped. It was nice and clear. I found it helpful.</i></p> <p><i>Yeah we did go over that a lot in class. That had that become clearer as we went through the weeks I started to understand that one a bit better. I think the discussion helped that become clearer.</i></p>
Significance of criteria sheets	<p><i>Well throughout the course I was one of those people that always had the criteria sheet there to make sure that I knew what was expected of me. So it was helpful having it nice and clear-cut... what I had to do to get what marks. And obviously the nesting....</i></p> <p><i>I definitely look at HD and make sure I'm incorporating all those things into my assignment.</i></p> <p><i>I felt like it was fair. It was a fair mark. It matched. if I was reading what I was doing, and I need to come back on track, this (criteria sheet) is what I referred to because you can so easily go off on a tangent so if you don't come back to whatever it is that the teacher actually wants, you're not going to get the results.</i></p> <p><i>I knew what to work to and even after I was done with task two I knew that I could've gone back and changed some of my wording to get this rather than that. But for me it was timeframe. Yeah, but I knew what I could've done. It's really funny because it means more to me in task two than it does in task three. I'm understanding it (criteria sheet) more from a task two perspective than a task three perspective which is really naughty.</i></p>
Wording of criteria and standards descriptors	<p><i>The second one (criterion), at first look, I wasn't quite sure what I have to do. But as we went through we learn more about marketing mixes and tutor was very good with showing us how it fits with other businesses. Definitely more explanation was needed for the marketing mix criterion.</i></p>

	<p><i>They (standards descriptors) use verbs such as discuss and stuff like that to make sure that you're doing..... Yeah they're very clear. It's nice when it says to discuss something (rather than the word understand). And it's not state something. It's a discussion where you're getting your views on the marketing mix with your Business.</i></p> <p><i>I make sure that I'm keeping up with the verbs and how they are incorporated with what is asked from me. I think it was very clear-cut. It definitely outlined what you had to do to get certain things and what it asked from you was very nicely written.</i></p> <p><i>Normally when I read these (standards descriptors) my mind jumbles as I go through but this was nicely written, it was a good sentence. It reads well it's pretty specific. I got a distinction from my course and I reckon I hit all of these.</i></p>
Nestedness	<p><i>From memory this one is the one I liked because you had to do each of them starting from the PAAS. You have to have each of them completed. So they stacked up. You had to finish this one and then You had to finish the next one to be able to work through it better.</i></p> <p><i>You had to have had discussed various aspects of the company and connect these, you had to do that, and once you have finished doing that you're then go onto a distinction. You do that and if you got that you get the next part. So it was a nice little guide to getting an HD.</i></p> <p><i>I think they (standards descriptors) do get harder because it's narrower in certain palaces...the nesting. It was good to have it built up. Visual wise.... I liked that we had to meet up and do the checkpoints. The checkpoints were very helpful.</i></p> <p><i>It does get harder so if you're aiming for this you've got to make sure that you've got all of them. We don't want to fail but we want all of that. We need to keep building.</i></p> <p><i>That's when I started to read it (the criteria sheet), like I said, when you get off track you go, have I hit that one or have I hit that one. Oh no I'm still here I need to add to it or do I need to reduce my word count and putting something different?</i></p> <p><i>I've seen the HD have a massive big description before and that's where I go well you don't actually tell me what it is I have to do to get the HD. You're telling me all of that and kind of little bits along, and it's all there but it's too much. I think they say that we don't read more than three sentences these days. And it's so true just about the definitions between the standards. How to build on it.</i></p>
Course Outline	<p><i>I don't remember the course outline</i></p> <p><i>Do you know what I refer to the course outline for? What materials I need for class. So I read it really early.</i></p>
Support materials (Guide)	<p><i>It was clear enough to me. But I come from a background where I understand rubrics. I come from a teaching background. If I didn't have this, I wouldn't have been able to do that, but he also developed a book that we used. They actually work well together</i></p>
Feedback	<p><i>And his feedback was really good too. That actually helped me identify how I can do better next time, once I got it back.</i></p>

Workshop discussions with Triad Leader

As noted above the Triad Leader participated in a one day professional development workshop at the end of the project. Prior to the workshop, the Triad Leader completed an online survey, asking for responses to a series of questions about the development of the rubric and the process itself. The Triad leader noted the value of substantive conversations, often robust, facilitated by different perspectives and insights brought by individual members of the Triad leading to a fine tuning of the rubric. Students appreciated being involved in the assessment design process though dialogic interactions with academics. Triad members noted the difficulty of defining expectations for students through deliberate choice of language used to explicit differentiate quality at different standards, the need for explicit rubrics especially in large courses and the potential for positive impact on moderation processes. Alignment of rubrics with course outlines was identified as a focus. The 10 question framework was acknowledged as a useful framework for guiding discussions. Being involved in a project about assessment was identified as strength of the project but demands on time, without accompanying compensation in workload calculations, was identified as a negative.

The responses to each question are detailed below.

Q. How do you think the triad conversations impacted on the rubrics in the course?

They have been a great help. My Business School partners already were both informed and passionate about the rubric they were using for the undergraduate management course, but insisted that having a substantive conversation about it lead to new insights and resulted in an improved rubric. In addition to the three focus groups that we carried out the Triad Leader attended a class with the tutor explaining the rubric and gaining information and ideas from the students about what they did not understand. ... the triad met to discuss the rubric and worked on improving it. Students were consulted about any future improvements to the rubric and a report has been written identifying ways in which the revised rubric meets the standard of the international accreditation body that has now approved courses run by the Business School.

Q. To what extent did the rubric improve?

As noted above the rubric had already been worked over on a number of occasions so that in the discussions the focus was mainly on fine tuning an already acceptable rubric. All three members of the team appreciated how difficult it is to define what it is that the students will do in order to prove that they have achieved a higher quality response. It was noted, in particular, how quantitative criteria can assist this function, for example if students know in terms of citations the number that would differentiate between a pass, credit, distinction, and high distinction. However, this does not take into account the quality of the source cited itself and to do so would mean that the rubric would become more and more unwieldy.

Q. To what extent did conversations contribute to assessment literacy?

The synergy that occurred in the focus group (triad meetings) between the assessment expert, the lecturer, and a tutor meant that different ideas and perspectives were canvassed. Just by voicing concerns and questions all members of the Triad increased their understanding of assessment and the ways in which students can be assisted to understand what the task requires and how the quality of their response will be judged.

Q. What is the result of having a quality criteria sheet at the point of grading, at moderation meetings and as a guide for students?

The students themselves made it very clear that they appreciated being brought into the assessment process. The opportunity for them to discuss with the tutor

what the rubric itself entails, was identified as a major improvement on other courses that they had experienced. The lecturer, who had a large number of tutors for the undergraduate course the rubric, which she had embedded as an online rubric in blackboard, was an essential tool to moderate the marking of a number of different tutors.

Q. What were the three most important topics discussed in your meetings that supported the development of a quality criteria sheet?

Perhaps the most important topic that was discussed in our meetings was how to overcome the problem of differentiating quality by using words such as unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good, very good and excellent and applying them to the criteria...In the rubric that we were working on the first criteria was ' Demonstrated mastery of key management concepts'. The rubric used unsatisfactory, satisfactory and good and linked them to the word 'explanation' to provide the standard for fail, pass, and credit. This 'good, better, best' notion was changed however for the two standards of distinction and high distinction. Instead of an adjective that described the quality of the explanation, the distinction level used the word 'analysis ' and a high distinction was qualified by the words ' critical evaluation'.

The second most important topic that we discussed was the alignment of all elements in the rubric with the course outline. Discussions led us to the conclusion that the rubric writing must begin with a very clear and detailed course outline in which the criteria for undertaking a task is simply stated.

The third topic was the importance of keeping a rubric as brief and straightforward as possible while at the same time covering all the essential criteria in the standard descriptors that differentiated quality in a response.

Q. What were the common issues associated with assessment task rubrics in your conversation?

...the principles of good assessment and the use of rubrics to explain clearly to students what was entailed if they wanted to achieve a particular grade, applied. We believe that our substantive conversations were enhanced.

Q. How do these issues impact students?

Using the 10 question framework has helped both the lecturer and his tutor to achieve constant improvement in the rubric that is linked to the core course that they teach...

Q. How do these issues impact the experiences of academics?

The main issues, namely, using a 10 question framework to improve rubrics and teaching..., have positively affected both the lecturer and tutor. The fact that they have been engaged in a project on rubrics ...has increased their understanding and expertise in the development and administration of rubrics.

Q. What are the strengths of a triad based peer review process?

The strengths of the Triad-based peer review process include the fact that the members of the Triad have different knowledge, skills and perspectives on the development of rubrics. Because of this they bring to the focus group table a plethora of experience and insights. A particular triad was marked by respect for each other and for the roles that we were undertaking. The focus group was very democratic and the conversations flowed freely.

Q. What are the areas for development in relation to the triads based process and how can the process be improved?

In order to further develop the triad based process for improving rubrics, support from the School and the university itself must occur. This project was undertaken by people who gained no workload allocation. It is unreasonable to expect that lecturers, tutors and mentors (rubric experts) would be able to engage in the work intensive process that occurred during 2018 to 2019 by those involved in our particular Business School triad. If time allocation for this type of project was included in one's workload then it is much more likely the quality of teaching and learning, and the reporting of quality improvement to TEQSA or other quality assurance agencies, would occur on a regular basis.

Discussion

As noted earlier, the research questions guiding this study were aimed at analyzing the process of evaluating rubrics in a Triad structure using a 10 question framework, the advantages of participating in assessment focussed research for assessors and finally, responses from students in regard to the clarity of rubrics they are engaging with in a Business context. The following discussion merges analysis of the three data sources, the triad discussions, the survey and the student responses. Synthesis of these data identified a variety of common themes across all data sources, in no order of significance, as follows:

- the value of having a framework for discussions
- the value of in-class discussions with students
- the significance of criteria sheets
- the clarity of wording used on criteria sheets; nestedness
- the need to declutter rubrics
- the importance of support materials in the form of a guide to complement the rubric
- substantive conversations between triad members and students and tutors
- richness of different perspectives
- the need for explicit rubrics especially in large courses where moderation is significant
- the need to meet accreditation requirements
- the difficulty of writing explicit rubrics that differentiate quality and thus need for a guide

The 10 question framework was identified by Triad members as a useful tool for facilitating discussions between Triad members about the targeted rubric. This confirms previous findings from multiple studies in regard to these 10 questions (Christie et al, 2015, Grainger, et al, 2017a; Grainger et al, 2017b;) in particular those questions that dealt specifically with the clarity of the rubric's criteria and standards descriptors.

These questions were:

Question 1: Does the rubric have criteria that are clear/unambiguous?;

Question 2: Do the criteria explain what must be done and demonstrated? ;

Question 5: Are the standards' descriptors explicit, devoid of subjective words, and positively worded in terms of what students must do? ;

Question 6: Are there gradations of quality that differentiate the standards clearly, for example, according to a taxonomy of learning such as Bloom's taxonomy?

Question 7: Is the layout of the criteria sheet clear, not too crowded, uncluttered, nested?

Question 8: Does the task provide opportunities for the students to demonstrate that they have achieved its intended outcomes, graduate attributes and skills according to specific criteria?

Question 9: Does the rubric reflect what students have studied for the task and enable them to demonstrate that they have met its criteria and standards? ; and finally,

Question 10: Does the rubric reflect course outlines as well as graduate attributes and skills?

However, some themes identified in the data were not related to the 10 question framework, for example the need to meet business accreditation requirements and this is due to the nature of the discipline. Similarly, the stringent accreditation requirements suggest that the provision of a supporting document for the rubric, in the form of a student guide, was necessary and valued by both students and triad members. This finding suggests that a rubric is not sufficient, in that the rubric tells students how they will be assessed whereas the accompanying guide tells them what will be assessed. In the case of complex tasks, it must be acknowledged that space limitations preclude detailed descriptions in rubrics, details which can be teased out in accompanying student guides, as was the case in this study. On the other hand, there is a danger that the rubric is the only document students read and hence the need for explicitness and clarity or conversely, that the guide is the only document students read, and then becomes the defacto quality assurance mechanism, not the rubric. It might be argued that the perceived need for a student guide is a historical remnant of this course, and the need for a rubric, especially a nested rubric (see discussion below) was not initially perceived as necessary. In this case study, the business course was a very large course with significant student enrolments and many tutors, highlighting the importance of the rubric for purposes of moderation. Hence, in this regard the framework is not able to satisfy discipline specific requirements in a Business context.

In addition, a theme of substantive dialogic discussions cannot be connected to any specific questions in the framework, despite the recognised value of recent research (Carless, 2016, 2019) that highlights the significance of these discussions for students. In this project, the value of discussion was also perceived by the Triad members, not just students. Triad members valued new perspectives from the project leader, who was not from the business discipline. This was an advantage of the Triad structure that brought together participants from different disciplines, and confirms the findings of Grainger et al (2015) that a Triad structure that facilitates discussions by participants from different disciplines is unique.

The findings highlight the importance of rubrics for both assessors and students, in particular the need for clarity, explicit statements of criteria and standards descriptors that are objective and not subject to interpretation. Whilst these perceived benefits are not new findings, what is new is the perceived benefits of nested rubrics, an aspect that has not been well documented. In this study, multiple references from all data sources, including students, were made about the value of nested models. This is in accord with findings from the limited studies in the field (Grainger 2020; Grainger & Weir, 2016) that highlight decluttering the rubric by focussing only on new discernible and characteristic behaviours that characterise a standard was an advantage. Respondents referred to this concept as 'graduated responses', illustrating gradations of quality from one standard descriptor to the next.

Related to this is the perceived benefit for both students and triad members, of participating in an assessment focussed project that developed their assessment literacies in relation to rubrics. For students, this is not a new finding as dialogic discussions about rubrics have been discussed at length in recent years in the assessment literature (Carless, 2016, Carless et al, 2017). What is new is the perceived benefits of discussions between academics in a triad structure in a Business context. The triad structure facilitated new perspectives about the clarity, or lack of clarity of the existing rubrics used in the course and introduced the Triad members to the nature of the nested model.

Conclusions

This project sought to develop the assessment practices of academics and students through the evaluation and refinement of assessment rubrics using a Triad based peer review structure in a Business context. The findings evidence the success of this study, that is academics and students valued the professional dialogic conversations, the rubrics improved and the nested aspect of rubrics was introduced and highlighted. The discipline specific characteristics of accreditation revealed a deficiency in the 10 question framework, specifically the need for a detailed student guide to complement and supplement the assessment rubrics.

This study reaffirmed the importance of explicit rubrics from the point of view of both assessors and students, the need for clarity in those rubrics and points to the perceived value of nested rubrics as a potential design solution to identified issues with vague rubrics. This study fills a gap in the research literature on assessment rubrics. The limitations of this research are acknowledged. This is just one case study in one context. The 10 question framework needs to be tested in many more disciplines and contexts. The perceived value of nested rubrics must be investigated further. More students need to be interviewed. The Triad structure for peer review of assessment is an innovation in tertiary education and needs to be replicated. In short, all of the positive findings of this study need to be replicated in larger studies in different contexts. However, the results of this research indicate that working in a triad structure, like a community of practice, facilitated many conversations about assessment, some of them challenging and ensured the discipline specific aspects of the business discipline to be rightfully considered when making improvements to assessment structures and practices.

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Appendix:

10 Question Framework

1. Does the rubric have criteria that are clear/unambiguous?
2. Do the criteria explain what must be done and demonstrated?
3. Are the criteria knowledge based and skills based at a Masters level standard?
4. Does the criteria sheet have standards identified (i.e., HD, D, C, P, F)?
5. Are the standards' descriptors explicit, devoid of subjective words, and positively worded in terms of what students must do?
6. Are there gradations of quality that differentiate the standards clearly, for example, according to a taxonomy of learning such as Bloom's taxonomy?
7. Is the layout of the criteria sheet clear, not too crowded, uncluttered, nested?
8. Does the task provide opportunities for the students to demonstrate that they have achieved its intended outcomes, graduate attributes and skills according to specific criteria?
9. Does the rubric reflect what students have studied for the task and enable them to demonstrate that they have met its criteria and standards?
10. Does the rubric reflect course outlines as well as graduate attributes and skills?