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ASSESSMENT CRITERIA TRANSPARENCY AND LEARNER AUTONOMY IN AN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES CLASS

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Student agency is the central principle of the OECD Learning Compass 2030, defined as the capacity to set goals, reflect, and act responsibly to effect change. The framework also recognises co-agency – the understanding that students, teachers, parents, and communities work together to help students progress towards their shared goals. Crucially, agency is not fixed but developmental: it grows as students learn, receive feedback, and reflect on their work [1, p. 2, 6-7]. This places assessment design, and particularly the transparency of assessment criteria, at the heart of fostering autonomous learners in higher education.

Learner autonomy and student agency are closely related concepts [1, p. 4-6], though agency is the broader of the two. Both, however, depend on a learner's capacity to understand what is expected of them, engage critically with feedback, and take meaningful action in response.

This capacity is discussed as "feedback literacy", the set of competencies that allows learners to engage productively with feedback. From the student side, feedback literacy comprises four interconnected features: appreciating feedback, making judgments, managing affect, and taking action. Students who are feedback literate recognise their active role in the educational process and can regulate their emotional responses constructively [2, pp. 1, 4-5]. This skill is particularly important in the context of written corrective feedback (WCF), where responses to comments, whether positive or negative, can significantly affect engagement and revision behaviour.

From the teacher's side, feedback literacy implies the ability to design and ensure an effective feedback process across three levels: macro-level programme

design, meso-level course implementation; and micro-level interaction [3, p. 161-163]. Assessment criteria transparency connects all three levels.

The longer-term goal of developing feedback literacy is the cultivation of "evaluative judgment" [4, pp. 467-469, pp. 474-475], the capacity to make decisions about the quality of one's own work and that of others. Once learners understand the required standards, they are equipped to function independently in academic and professional contexts. Peer feedback activities and the analysis of examples are among the most well-evidenced methods for developing this judgment in students.

Rubrics are the most widely used tool for making assessment criteria transparent, and they are broadly associated with supporting self-regulated learning (SRL). However, the relationship between rubric use and learner autonomy is not straightforward. Some studies found that providing too detailed assessment criteria raised student anxiety and led learners to focus on trivial surface features rather than deeper quality. Similarly, researchers argue that explicit criteria can signal to students that knowledge is fixed and stable, potentially discouraging the development of independent, critical thinking required in higher education [See: 5, p. 10, p. 93, p. 104, p. 111]. These findings suggest that transparency in assessment is not simply a matter of providing more information, but it requires careful calibration so that criteria guide rather than limit thinking.

This tension becomes particularly relevant in the context of generative artificial intelligence. As AI tools become increasingly accessible to students, EAP assessment faces new challenges, but at the same time, AI offers potential as a supplement to human feedback. AI tools can support rather than replace the development of feedback literacy.

These developments point toward a process-oriented model of EAP assessment in which evaluative judgment is the primary goal. Transparent assessment criteria remain essential, and their value lies not in reducing complexity for students, but in giving them the tools to act independently. Feedback literacy, SRL, and responsible use of AI are the components of learner autonomy. Assessment design should address them to prepare students for the demands of academic and professional life beyond the classroom.

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