

How? Why? What? Who?

Decolonising

Assessment



Cover art explained.

Taking inspiration from bell hooks text 'Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom' (1994) and Tim Stephens paper artwork 'Whiteness' (2019) in the UAL Zine 'Decolonising the Arts Curriculum' (2019), I have produced a piece of artwork responding to decolonisation focusing on language using charcoal, paper and photography. Decolonisation does not mean the removal of all Western entities but recognizing that other voices exist too and they should be celebrated.

When it comes to language in assessment both written and oral, student feedback literacy is key. Educators play an important role in facilitating this process from curriculum design, assessment related activities and providing feedback itself. 'Feedback literacy demands that learners acquire the academic language necessary for understanding, interpreting and thinking with complex ideas' (Sutton, 2018 in Carless and Boud, 2018). Therefore academic discourse needs to be unpacked in project briefs, learning outcomes, assessment criteria

at every stage of the feedback process. Creating spaces to decode grandiose academic language would ideally be worked into the course design early on, to be deconstructed verbally with students. Better still, how wonderful would it be to include a cross-cultural panel of post-graduates to work with academics to design and write assessment processes/materials representing a cumulation of voices to ensure they are understood by a younger diverse cohort? This would also ensure we are placing students at the forefront of assessment design and engaging students meaningfully.

Tacit knowledge is also fundamental to feedback literacy, tying into the overarching assessment process itself in terms of how we construct knowledge based on social constructivist learning theories. 'For students to develop their feedback literacy, they also need to acquire tacit knowledge, the kind of understanding which is difficult to communicate directly (Polanyi, 1958 in Carless and Boud, 2018). Could we therefore create more innovative spaces to allow for tacit knowledge to be integrated into the assessment procedures where emphasis isn't placed on the English language to construct assessment itself? 'The need for a specific approach to assessment that captures the broader learning outcomes related to attitudes and behaviours as opposed to the technical outcomes' (Whelan, Maher & Deevy 2017). Through doing this, assessment could become more personalised and valued to each student and open up spaces for diverse perspectives and expression. Including those voices who are inadvertently obstructed and obscured.

I was drawn to Tim Stevens' artwork combining paper and photography to represent whiteness, using the mirror as a tool to reflect whiteness back on itself. Paper is a material I started working with a couple of years ago. A material full of meaning and as Steven's mentions 'a material that facilitated colonisation' (2019) through agreements, ownership, for goods and land. Charcoal is an ancient medium which has been used for thousands of years. Its component is a key ingredient in cave paintings.

In my artwork, a sheet of large white paper dominates the foreground. Underneath sits another sheet of paper featuring words which are hidden. Caged. Silenced. A knife has been used to cut slits into the paper depicting mouths, allowing for other voices to come through. The weak structure of charcoal meant lettering was smudged in the making process. Words, voices, downtrodden, overpowered. Erased. Written in my left hand. A place of unfamiliarity. 'Unremembered tongues', 'language as a weapon' (hooks, 1994) and mother tongue are fragmented words which can be revealed. As hooks writes, 'we must change conventional ways of thinking about language, creating spaces where diverse voices can speak in words other than English, or in broken vernacular speech' (hooks, 1994).



Laura Blight

What is Decolonisation?

Decolonisation is a new approach in academia that aims to acknowledge the disenfranchised status of underrepresented communities and social groups in the construction and dissemination of authoritative knowledge.

Why should you know about it?

Not recognising the gaps presented by a West-dominated curriculum risks perpetuating models of knowledge based on white supremacy, a cultural baggage of the colonial era.



Why does it concern education?

Assuming an approach to education informed by decolonisation is a lot more inclusive in nature. Are you feeling uncomfortable with the left-aligned text boxes on this page? This could be the experience of many learners that educators may usually not acknowledge.

Why does it concern assessment?

Building an inclusive approach to education is not enough. An assessment brief may still carry tacit assumptions about what a student should demonstrate in the assessment, not articulated in the learning outcomes. These create barriers in assessing students' learning.

Have you decolonised your teaching and assessment?



What can you do?

We can begin by dismantling the “achievement gap” which aims to explain the lower rates of success in minority groups. This, however may be misleading as achievement gap points to possible problems within the groups that score lower in HE, and not to the pitfalls in the assessments that cause this disparity.

Adapting a more inclusive content may be a good start. Recognising the contributions of black, indigenous individuals to knowledge, art and science or their histories is crucial.*

Next, we need to envision an assessment that avoids the learning gaps and that is fair and equal to everyone.

Does all this sound too complex? Don't worry, just turn the page for more tips on decolonising your assessment!



How can you do it?

A fair assessment has to build on students' prior knowledge and experience.

Teachers should endeavour to have or make the opportunity to assess where the student is situated upon arrival to the learning environment.

Especially for first year students, support should be given on how to read and write for academic purposes, how to organise time, how to access resources and assistance.

Follow our guide for more general tips on decolonising your assessment particularly on:

- Improving clarity of learning outcomes and assessment criteria
- Improving intercultural communication in formative assessment

What can we do to decolonise our assessment process?

Transparency and Clarity

in terms of teaching and learning in terms of expectation, outcomes and opportunities.
Make time in core teaching to go through assessment expectations.

Smith, Kennon M. (2013)



Define LO so students can engage in different ways.

Orr, S, & Shreeve, A 2017

Language-unpack and keep simple.

Duna Sabri in UAL (2019)
Payhip, n.d.)



“creating spaces where diverse voices speak”

UAL(2019 pg 49.)

Allow students to make connections to existing knowledge and experiences.

SOAS (2018).
Jacobs, R. (2020)



Make internationalisation part of the learning process.

Ask students what is their existing knowledge and experience.

Freeman et al. (2009, p. 16)



“These contributions are resources“

hooks, b. (1994) pg8

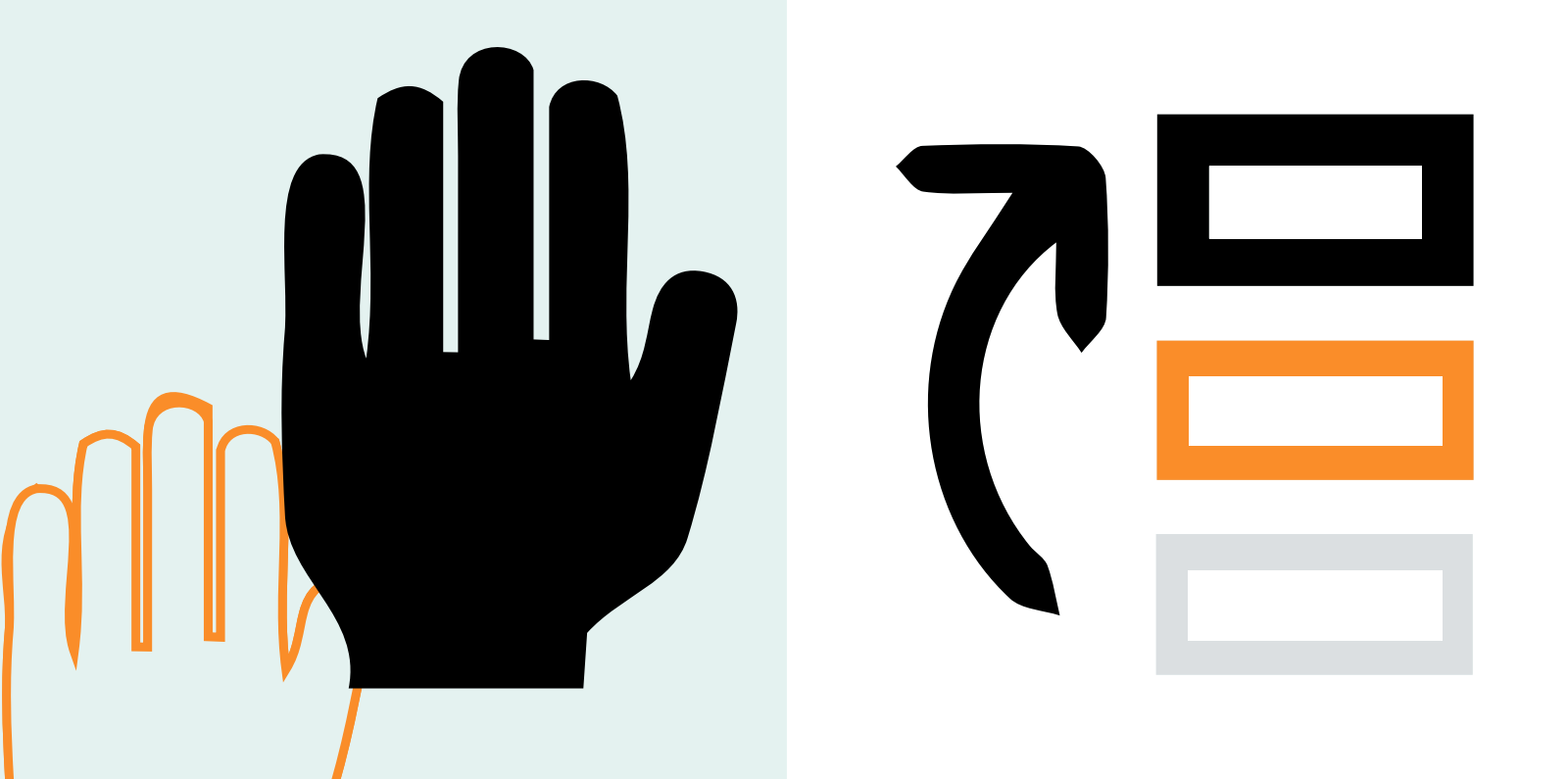
Manage the class room.

Generate participation and confidence.
Proactively disrupt and restructure conversation.

Inclusive teaching. Can you introduce the progressive stack?

The Tattooed Professor (2017)

Encourage more regular formative diagnostic assessment
Jacobs, R. (2020)



Spend time with students individually to offer formative advice.

Schedule time for conversations with students and engage with issues related to inequalities and discrimination.



Devise assessment that builds up skills iteratively

SOAS (2018).

Diversify assessment to recognise and encourage different skill sets.

Jacobs, R. (2020)



“the methods of assessing that have spoken to me in terms of decolonization are always more diagnostic, multiple methods”

Jacobs, R. (2020)



Improving Clarity of Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria

Opportunities to Decolonise Assessment & Explore the Opportunity Gap

Are you seeking student input on content?

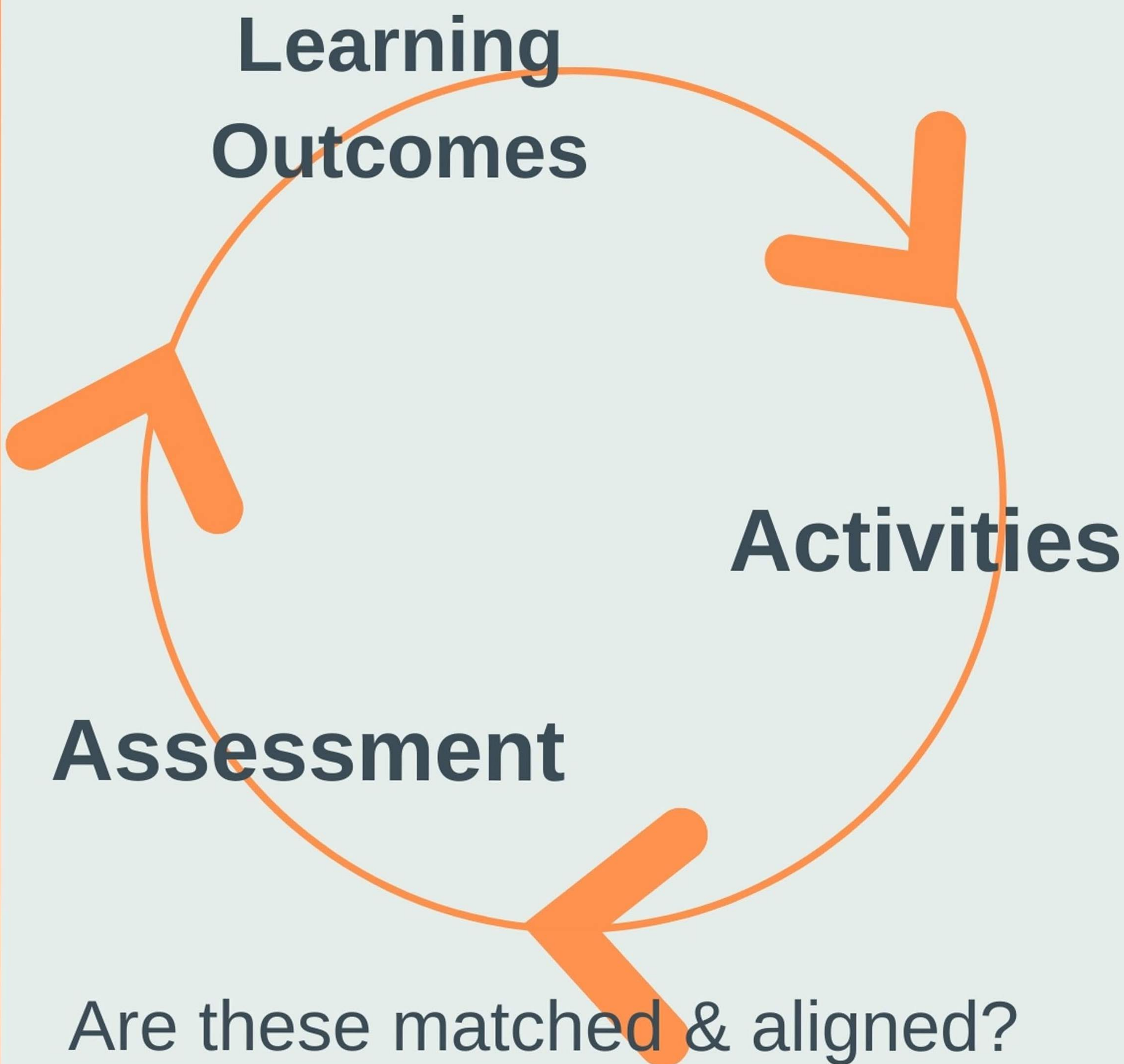


Do you signal willingness to engage with issues related to inequalities & discrimination?

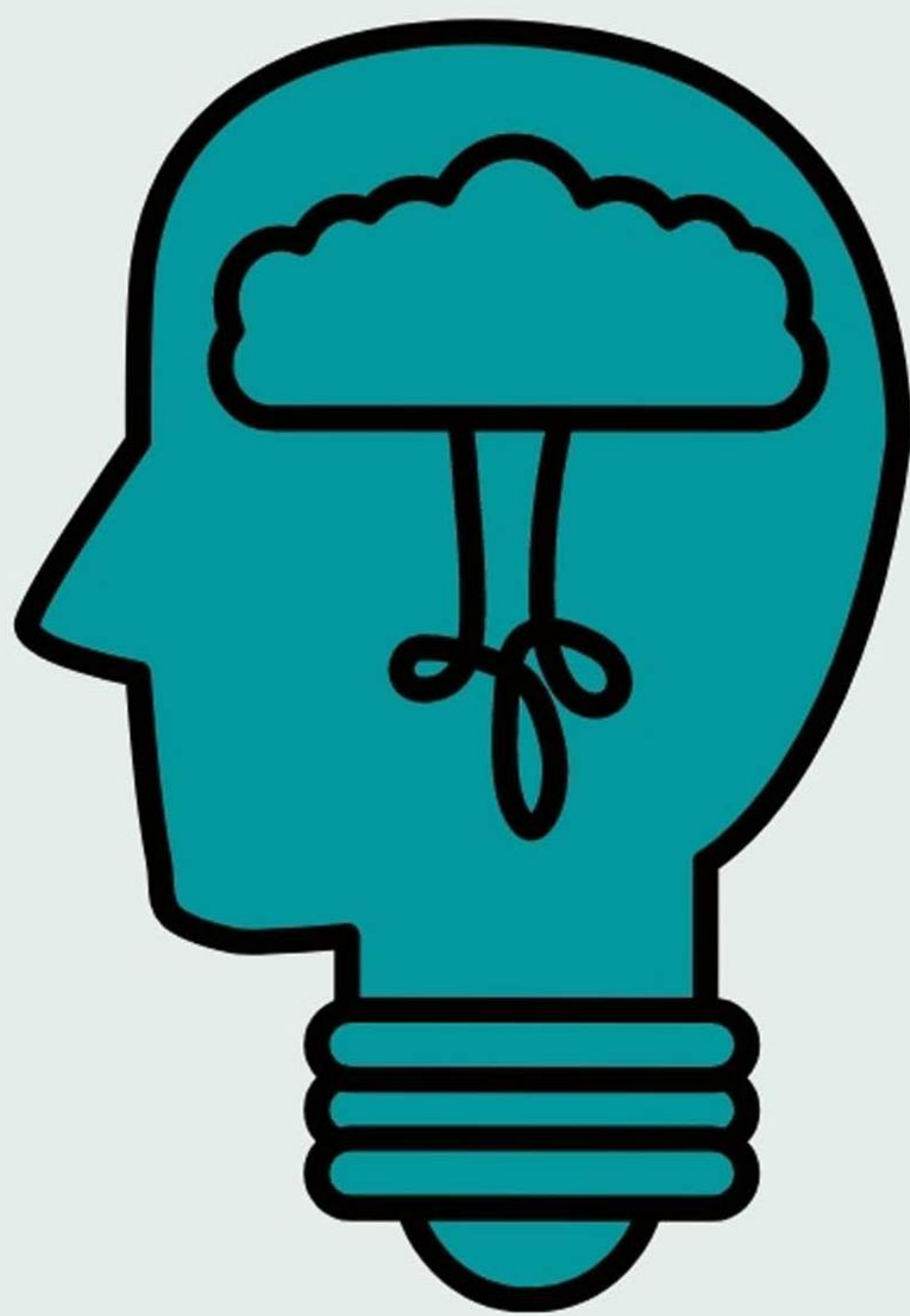
Are you building on students prior knowledge?

(Hooks,B. 1994 & SOAS, 2018)

Constructive Alignment



(Biggs, J. 2003)



Transparency & Clarity

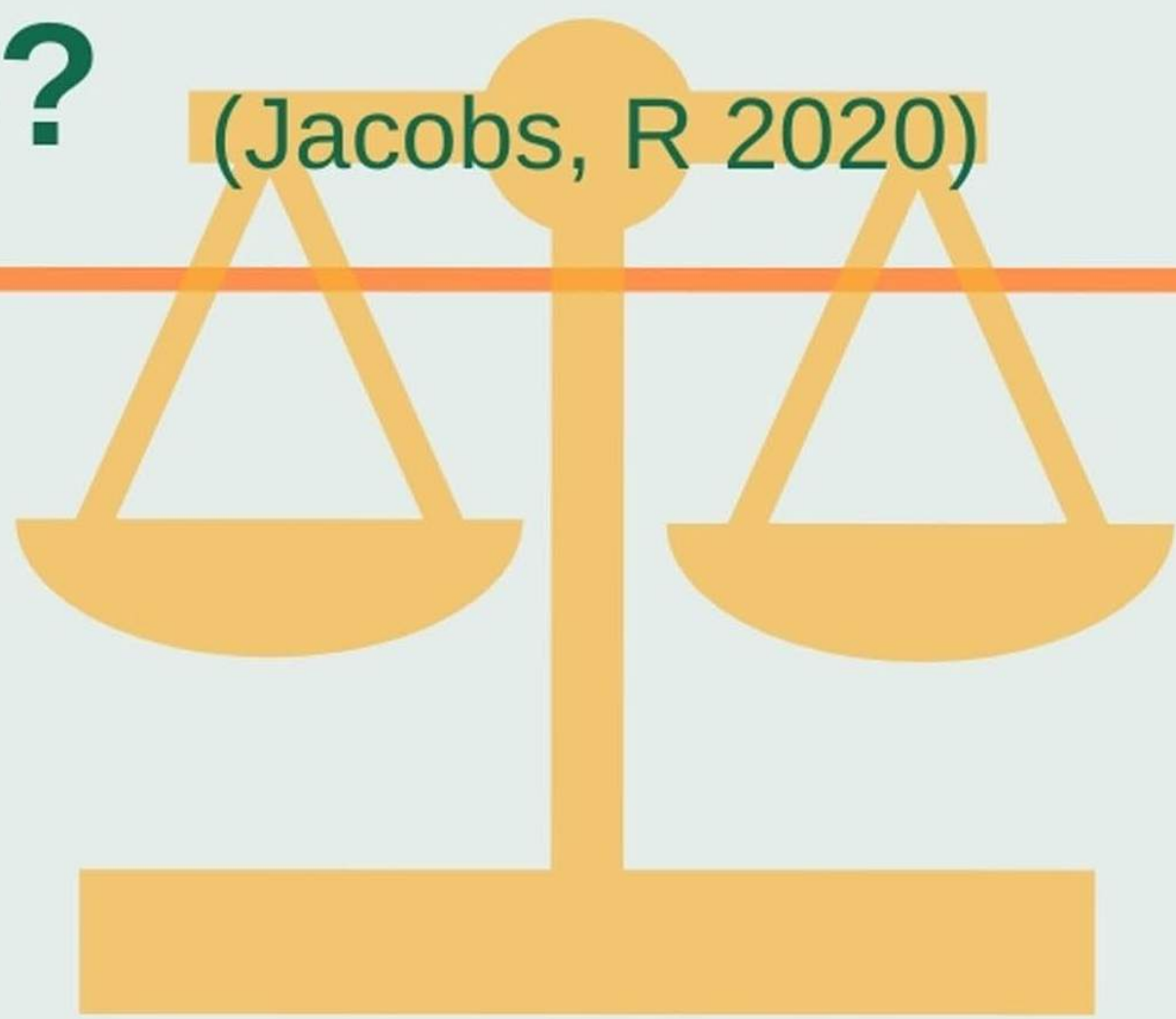
Do you have this in all aspects of teaching & learning: expectations, outcomes & opportunities?

(SOAS, 2018)

Have you checked for unconscious bias and racialised disadvantage?

(Jacobs, R 2020)

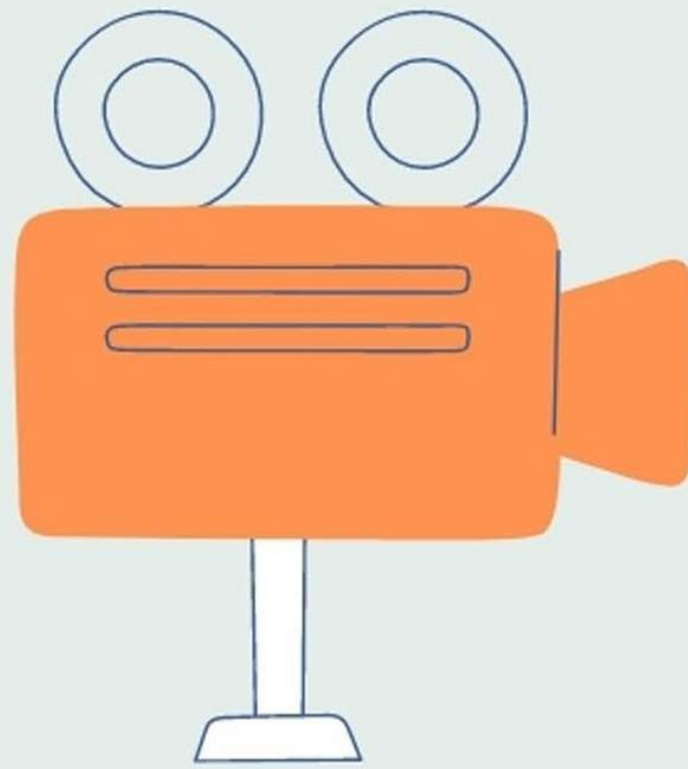
Diversified Assessment Practices



Are learning outcomes defined in a way which allows students to engage in different ways?



Are you recognising & cultivating different skill sets & allowing opportunities to develop knowledge?



(SOAS, 2018)

Feedback + Progress = Rubric



Does your feedback correspond to the rubric and demonstrate how to progress?

Have you made time in core teaching to go through assessment expectations explicitly?



(SOAS, 2018)

Improving Intercultural Communication in Formative Assessment

How can all aspects of formative assessment be considered to ensure they are inclusive and feedback literacy is supportive/empowering for all students?

How can we explore multi-sensory mediums and technology to communicate formative assessment cross-culturally?

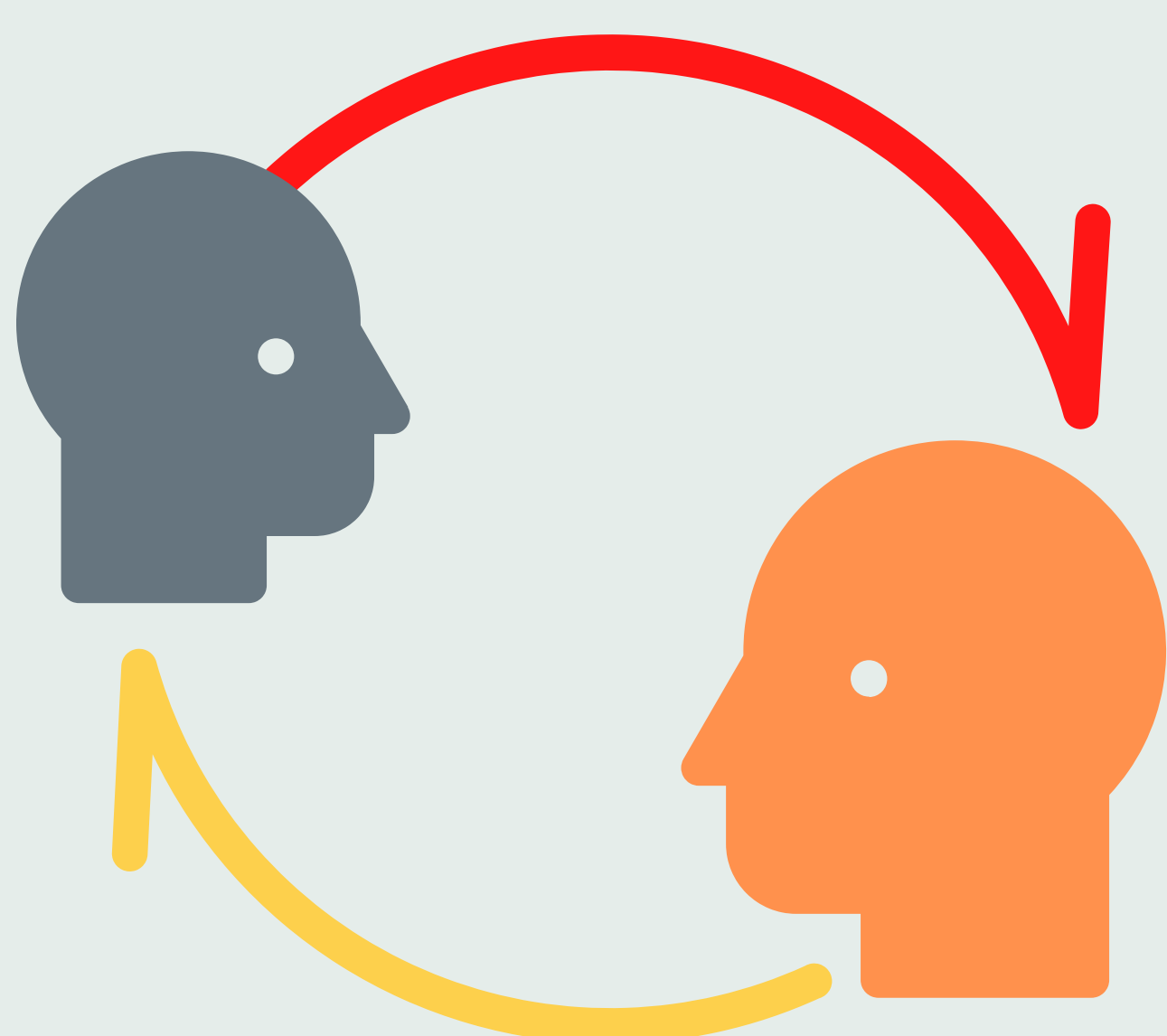


Reviewing the balance between formative and summative assessment

the frequency and variety of assessment, and paying close attention to assessment loads helps ensure that a feedback loop can occur as students progress through their course ([Winstone and Carless, 2019](#); [Carless and Boud, 2018](#)).

Feedback literacy

demands that learners acquire the academic language necessary for understanding, interpreting and thinking with complex ideas" ([Sutton, 2012](#) in [Carless & Boud, 2018](#))



How can we ensure formative assessment feedback has been understood? Ensure you have an open dialogue with your learners and offer the opportunity for learners to record oral feedback.



"Consideration of over/under-assessment, variety of assessment, implementation of formative assessment, relevance and timeliness of feedback helps to uncover the relationship between assessment practices and the student experience" ([The Exchange, 2020](#))

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Page 2

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Page 8

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