

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Sunderland
Unit of Assessment: 25
Title of case study: Dr Maddalena Taras' research on assessment theory and practice in Higher Education.
1. Summary of the impact

Taras' assessment research while Higher Education (HE) focused, is pertinent at all levels. There is considerable evidence that it has impact on debate, staff development and academic practice in UK universities and internationally. It covers assessment practices and discourses including linguistic and cultural influences on perceptions of assessment. Her original self-assessment model is a paradigm shift linking practice and theory supporting student learning and inclusion in assessment. An original theoretical framework for summative, formative and self-assessment represents a second paradigm shift. Her work has been widely disseminated through publication in high status journals and at conference and seminar presentations.

2. Underpinning research

Taras' most significant achievements are in developing and producing original and innovative theory and practice relating to student learning and assessment in HE. Her work has been widely disseminated, and has provoked considerable interest in academic communities within and beyond the UK. It explores the relationship between assessment and learning processes with the explicit intention of improving practice in order to enhance student learning and participation, with a particular focus on engaging and empowering learners through appropriate self-assessment practices.

Specific contributions include

- The development of an original self-assessment model to support student learning and inclusion in assessment. Taras developed and evaluated a specific procedure for using self-assessment, involving three distinctive features, first, to use summative, graded work for self-assessment; second, for students to negotiate peer (and tutor) feedback to help them identify and understand their errors prior to self-assessment; and third, that students receive their grade only after they have completed the formative, learning aspect of the self-assessment exercise. Tutors and students evaluation of this process reported positive outcomes. (Taras 2001, 2002, 2003)
- The creation of an original theoretical framework explicating a new relationship between summative, formative and self-assessment. The argument is that all assessment is summative, in that it involves making a judgement, and that formative assessment is best understood as summative assessment plus feedback which is negotiated and used by learners (Taras 2005).
- Developing a critique of Assessment for Learning (AfL) promoted in schools and initial teacher training (Black et al 2003) and in England through the government funded National Strategies initiative (and increasingly world-wide). Taras questions the definitions of formative assessment and the underpinning theoretical assumptions, identifying the contradictions that ensue in practice. She proposes a paradigm shift based on understanding formative and summative assessment as processes (Taras 2009).
- A topology of five self-assessment models in HE. These are compared in terms of their rationales, processes and support for learners. They are classified in terms of weak and

Impact case study (REF3b)

strong forms of self-assessment, reflecting the degree of involvement of students and tutors in each model. Taras provides a concise overview of self-assessment approaches, permitting educators to make informed choices in their professional practice (Taras 2010).

The value of this body of work is acknowledged by international experts in the field of student (self) assessment. It is described by a University of Hong Kong Professor as 'a cutting edge example of the interrelationship between theory and practice'. An Emeritus Professor of Learning Development (Open University) admires her 'probing scholarship' and 'provocative thinking'. A University of Gothenburg Professor reports that 'Dr Taras has established herself as an international authority in her field of specialisation'. She has co-edited a book on feedback in HE, which a Visiting Professor, at Lancaster University expects to be 'a key text in the pedagogy of HE'.

The work was conducted over twenty years at the University of Sunderland. She held a University Teaching Fellowship to disseminate the use of student self-assessment across the university (1994-1996).

3. References to the research**Key outputs**

- 1) Taras, M (2001) The use of Tutor Feedback and Student Self-assessment in Summative Assessment Tasks: towards transparency for students and for tutors, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 26(6) 606-614
- 2) Taras, M (2002) Using assessment for learning and learning from assessment, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 27(6) 501-510
- 3) Taras, M (2005) Assessment: Summative and Formative, some theoretical reflections *British Journal of Educational Studies* 53(3) 466-478
- 4) Taras, M. (2009) Summative Assessment: the Missing Link for Formative Assessment *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Feb 33(1), 57–69
- 5) Taras, M (2010) Student Self-assessment: processes and consequences, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(2) 199-213.

The outputs can be accessed at

<http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/view/creators/Taras=3AMaddalena=3A=3A.html>

4. Details of the impact

Taras' research outputs have informed her own professional practice in her teaching and research roles, and have also had considerable impact within the University of Sunderland, through her University Teaching fellowship. Her work has had impact on debate and practice in HE and schools, nationally and internationally.

The main beneficiaries of Taras' work have been academic staff in HEIs in the UK and overseas, and their students. Her work has also been applied in a Swedish research study in improving practice in language learning in secondary schools.

Taras' theoretical work and empirical research has been disseminated through publication in prestigious refereed journals (eg *Assessment and Evaluation in HE*, *Teaching in HE*, the *British Journal of Education Studies*, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*).

- presentations at c40 national and international conferences concerned with student learning and assessment practices and theories since 2001, including many invited presentations and keynotes, see:

<http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/view/creators/Taras=3AMaddalena=3A=3A.html>

Impact case study (REF3b)

- Invitations to lead staff development activities at keynotes and seminars on developing assessment practice at the University of Sunderland and other universities (eg Buckingham New 2013 (Keynote), Bolton 2012 (Keynote), Durham 2011, Liverpool Hope 2010, Wolverhampton 2005)

Specifically, the impact of her work can be seen in the following interrelated areas;

- *Use of research findings in the conduct of professional work or practice.* Educators have explored and applied aspects of Taras' work in universities and schools within and beyond the UK.
 - Its use in accredited programmes for HE staff (e.g. MA in Academic Practice at the University of Northumbria; MA Education, PG Cert in Teaching and Learning in HE, PGCE programmes at the University of Sunderland; and on university Learning and Development websites (e.g. Leeds Metropolitan University (<http://alt-resource.teams.leedsmet.ac.uk/formative-assessment/formative-assessment-publications>))
 - An Assistant professor uses Taras' work in her work as a consultant in HE in other provinces in Canada as well as in her current institution. It informs the design of three workshops on course design, peer assessment and self-assessment. Her work and review of the concepts and models is cited and used as a key reference in these professional development workshops, which are offered to approximately 120 instructors and administrators every semester [Source 4].
 - Staff at the University of Gothenburg have applied Taras' model of self-assessment (2001, 2002) in a research project with secondary school pupils, and report positive outcomes (see <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/19783>) [Source 2].
 - Staff in UK universities and internationally report applying Taras' research findings in their professional practice:
 - A Professor reports that he and colleagues at the University of the Highlands and Islands, have implemented delaying coursework grades until students have digested and considered comments on their work as recommended by Taras (2001, 2002) [Source 1].
 - A Senior Lecturer in Physiotherapy (Northumbria University) reports that she and colleagues on the MA in Academic Practice found Taras' work valuable in critiquing and developing their assessment practice.
 - An Associate Professor of the Teacher Education programme reports that it has influenced her own practice, in university and school, and that of her student teachers [Source 3].
 - It has influenced the development of formative peer assessment at Edinburgh Napier University Business Studies degree
 - Taras (2005) is used as one of three key texts in two MA modules in Singapore National Institute of Education. "It is used as a conceptual anchor for the role of summative assessment in formative assessment: it is an important conceptual lightbulb for the students" [Source 6].
- *Development of resources to enhance professional practice.* Taras has made significant contribution in this area. Her work is frequently used in university staff development activities. Many of her papers have web links in different languages and countries worldwide, several have been used in influential national initiatives
 - Taras (2002) was one of two key texts in a European-funded project (2002-04) on Internet-based Assessment
http://www.onlineassessment.nu/onlineas_webb/materials/Work_bibl/Bibliography_2.htm
 - She was invited in 2009 to become a member of the 'Osney Grange Group' of 'leading researchers and writers' to examine feedback practices in the UK and to propose an

Impact case study (REF3b)

Agenda for Change for stakeholders and policy makers. This group has run change academy style events, produced resources, and published a book, which Taras is co-edited, section edited and written a chapter (<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/OGG.html>)
<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415692359/>

- The State university of Ponta Grossa, Brazil commissioned an updated version of Taras (2005) which was published in Portuguese and English by Praxis Educativa in 2010. It was reprinted in “Didática e Formação de Professores”, edited by Professor Claudio Pinto at the University of Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia, Brazil (2012)

See also

http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?start=50&q=%22maddalena+taras%22&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5

• *Practitioner debate has been informed or stimulated by research findings.* As described above, Taras’ work has stimulated debate amongst HE practitioners. It has challenged hegemonic assumptions concerning the models of assessment and self-assessment routinely employed in HE, and has questioned the validity and value of Assessment for Learning as currently understood and applied in education settings.

In recognition of her impact Taras has been awarded a National Teaching Fellowship 2013 (HEA).

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/contacts/detail/nvfs/2013/Taras_Maddalena_profile_nvfs_2013

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

People contactable to corroborate the impact of Dr Taras’ work

1. Professor, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
2. Associate Professor in Foreign Language Didactics, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway
3. Associate Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning, Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology, University of Alberta, Canada
4. Post-doctoral researcher, University of Oulu, Finland
5. Associate Professor, National Institute of Education, Singapore

People who have provided a written statement:

1. Professor, Open University
2. Professor, University of Hong Kong
3. Professor, Lancaster University
4. Associate Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Alberta, Canada
5. Associate Professor in Foreign Language Didactics, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim