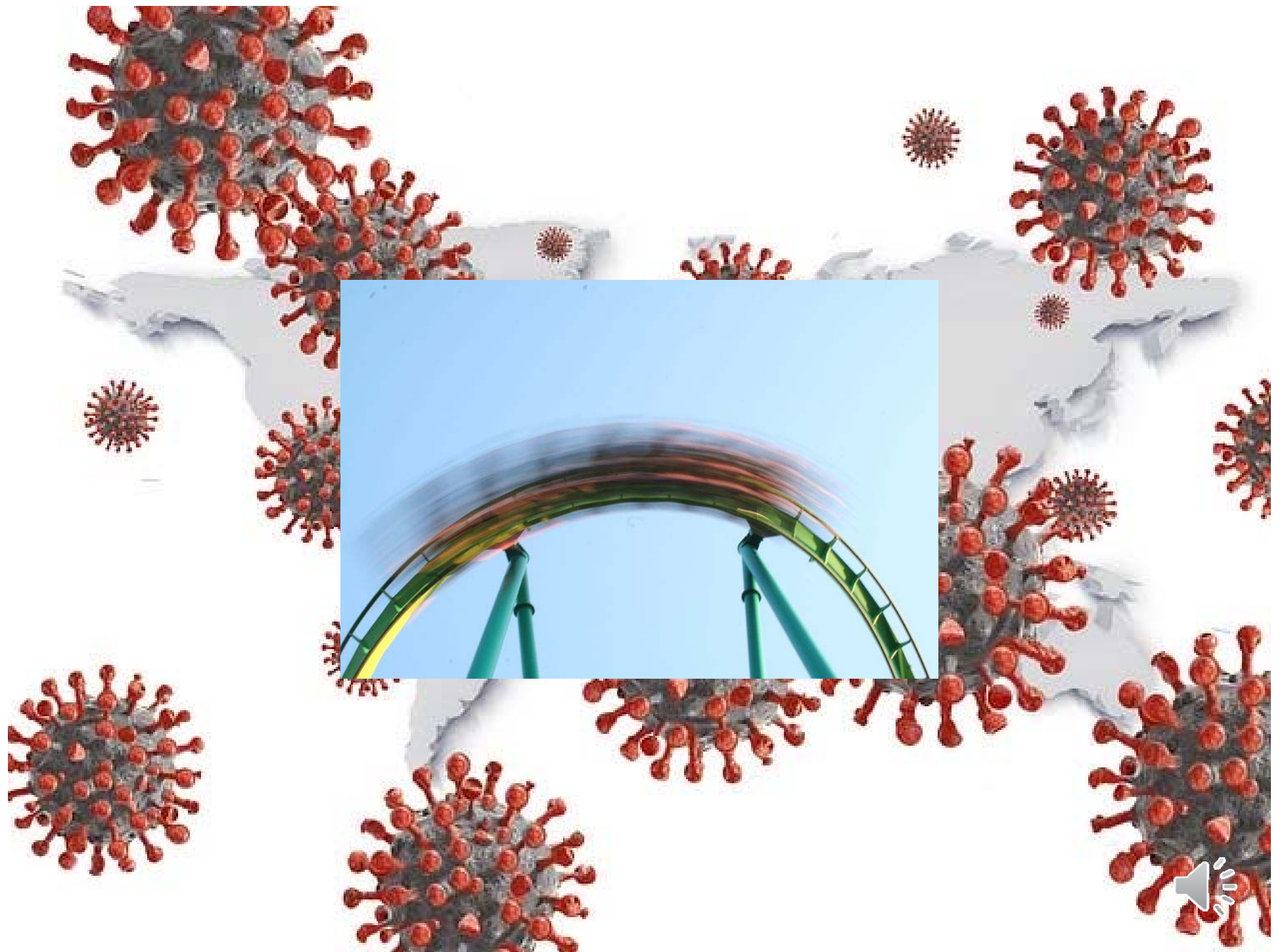# Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education

Shifting the assessment paradigm to promote and support C21st learning

Prof Kay Sambell, Edinburgh Napier University

ASI Inaugural Seminar EdUHK & HKBU,

July 6th 2020

Coronavirus Assessment Collection

Edinburgh Napier UNIVERSITY

- March 13th Brown, S. and Sambell, K (2020a) 'Contingency planning: exploring rapid alternatives to face to face assessment'

- April 2nd Brown, S. and Sambell, K (2020b) Fifty tips for replacements for time-constrained, invigilated on-site exams

- June 1st Sambell, K., and Brown, S. (2020c)The changing landscape of assessment: some possible replacements for unseen, time-constrained, face-to-face invigilated exams

- Forthcoming July Brown, S. and Sambell, K. (2020d) A Manifesto for Forward-Looking Assessment

All available for download at
https://sally-brown.net/kay-sambell-and-sally-brown-covid-19-assessment-collection/covid19/
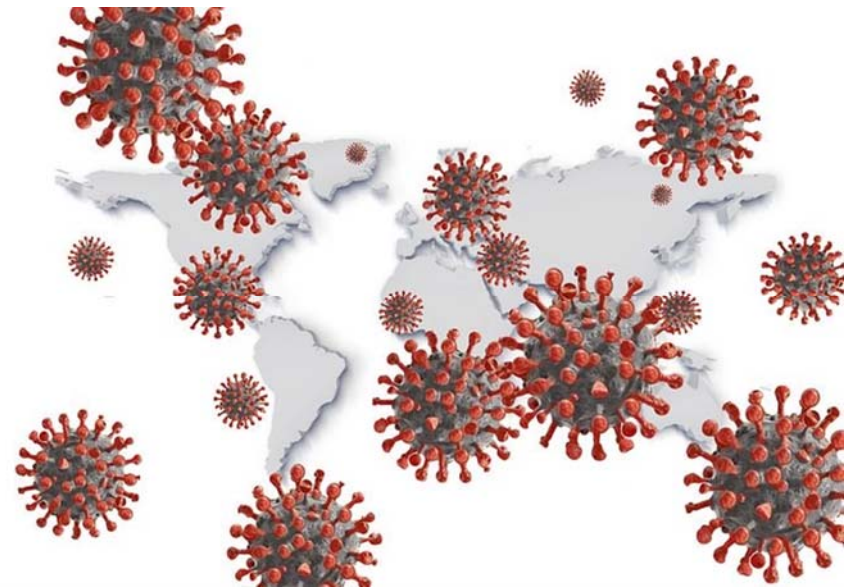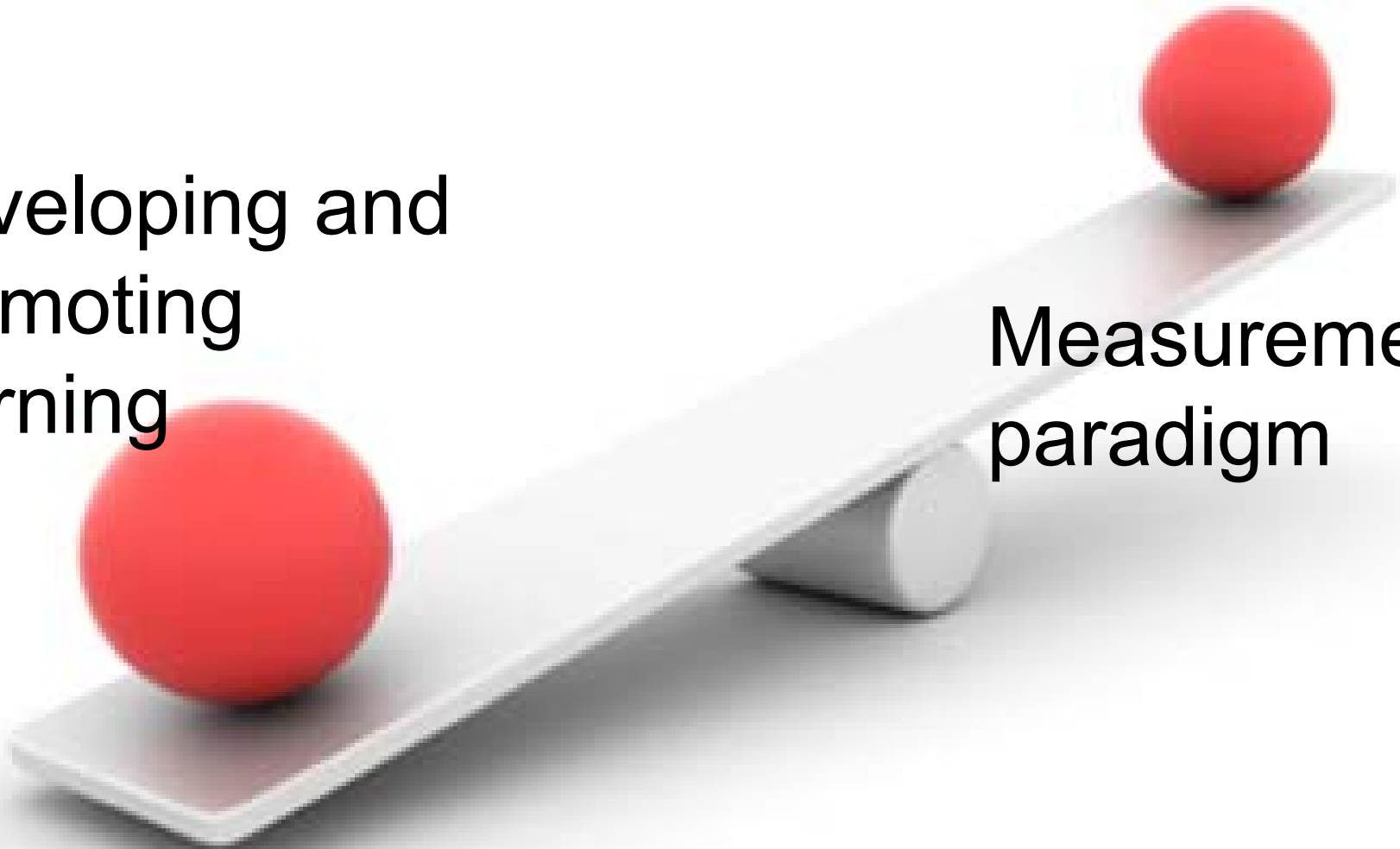
AfL: rebalancing main purposes of assessment

Developing and promoting learning

Measurement paradigm

ASSESSMENT for LEARNING
in HIGHER EDUCATION

Kay Sambell, Liz McDowell
and Catherine Montgomery

ROUTLEDGE

The Enabling Power of Assessment 5
Series Editor: Claire M. Wyatt-Smith

David Carless
Susan M. Bridges
Cecilia Ka Yuk Chan
Rick Glofcheski   Editors

Scaling up
Assessment
for Learning
in Higher
Education

Springer

Developing Effectiv...
Assessment in

Copyrighted Material

SRHE Society for Research into Higher Education

Designing Effective
Feedback Processes
in Higher Education

A LEARNING-FOCUSED APPROACH

Copyrighted Material

Implementing
student
self-assessment

Copyrighted Material

Rethinking
Assessment in
Higher Education

Learning for the longer term

Edited by DAVID BOUD and NANCY FALCHIKOV

Copyrighted Material

RECONCEPTUALISING
FEEDBACK IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

DEVELOPING DIALOGUE WITH STUDENTS

Edited by Stephen Merry, Margaret Price,
David Carless and Maddalena Taras

Copyrighted Material

EDITED BY
David Boud
Rola Ajjawi
Phillip Dawson
Joanna Tai

**Developing
Evaluative
Judgement**
in Higher
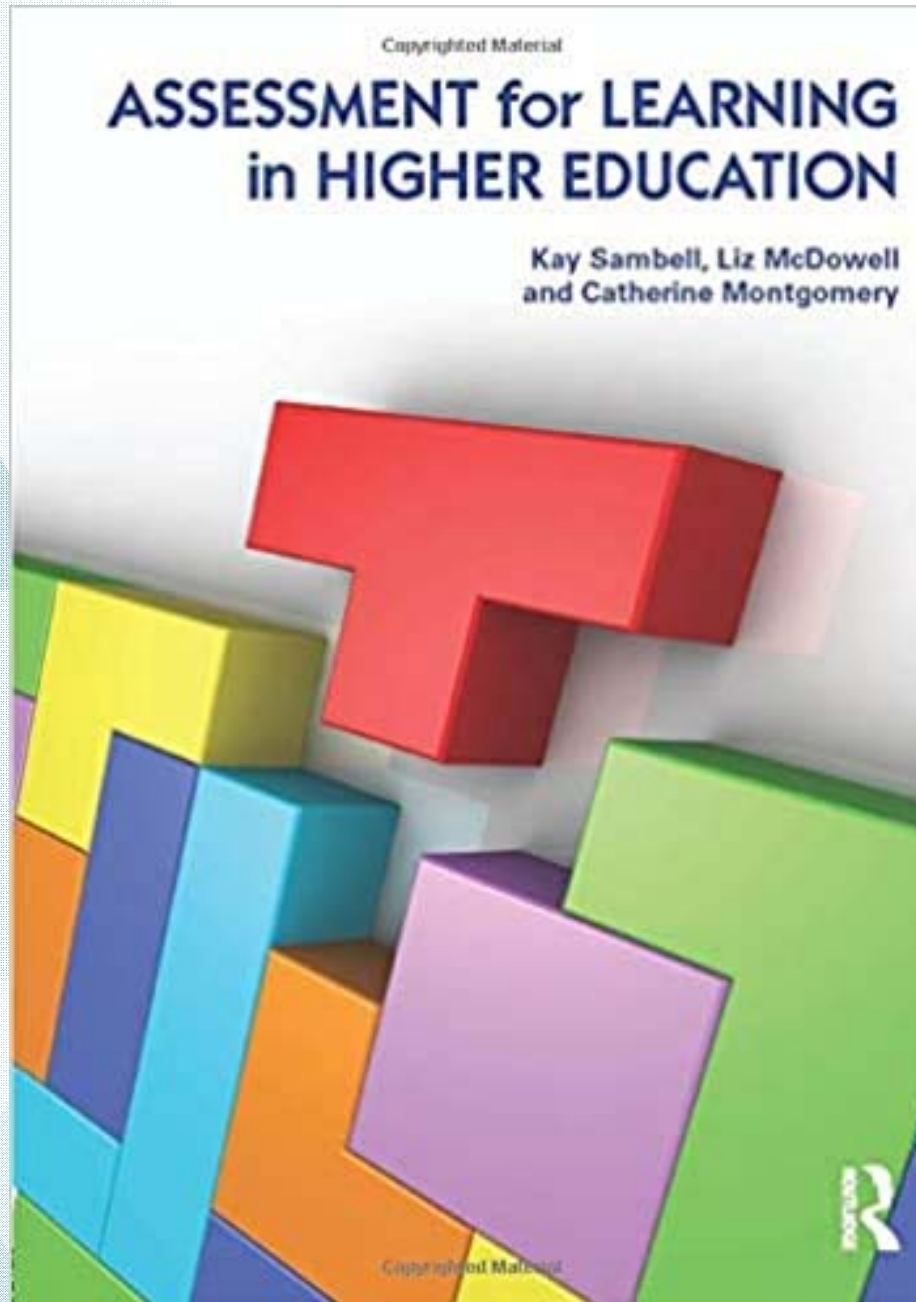Education

ASSESSMENT FOR KNOWING AND
PRODUCING QUALITY WORK

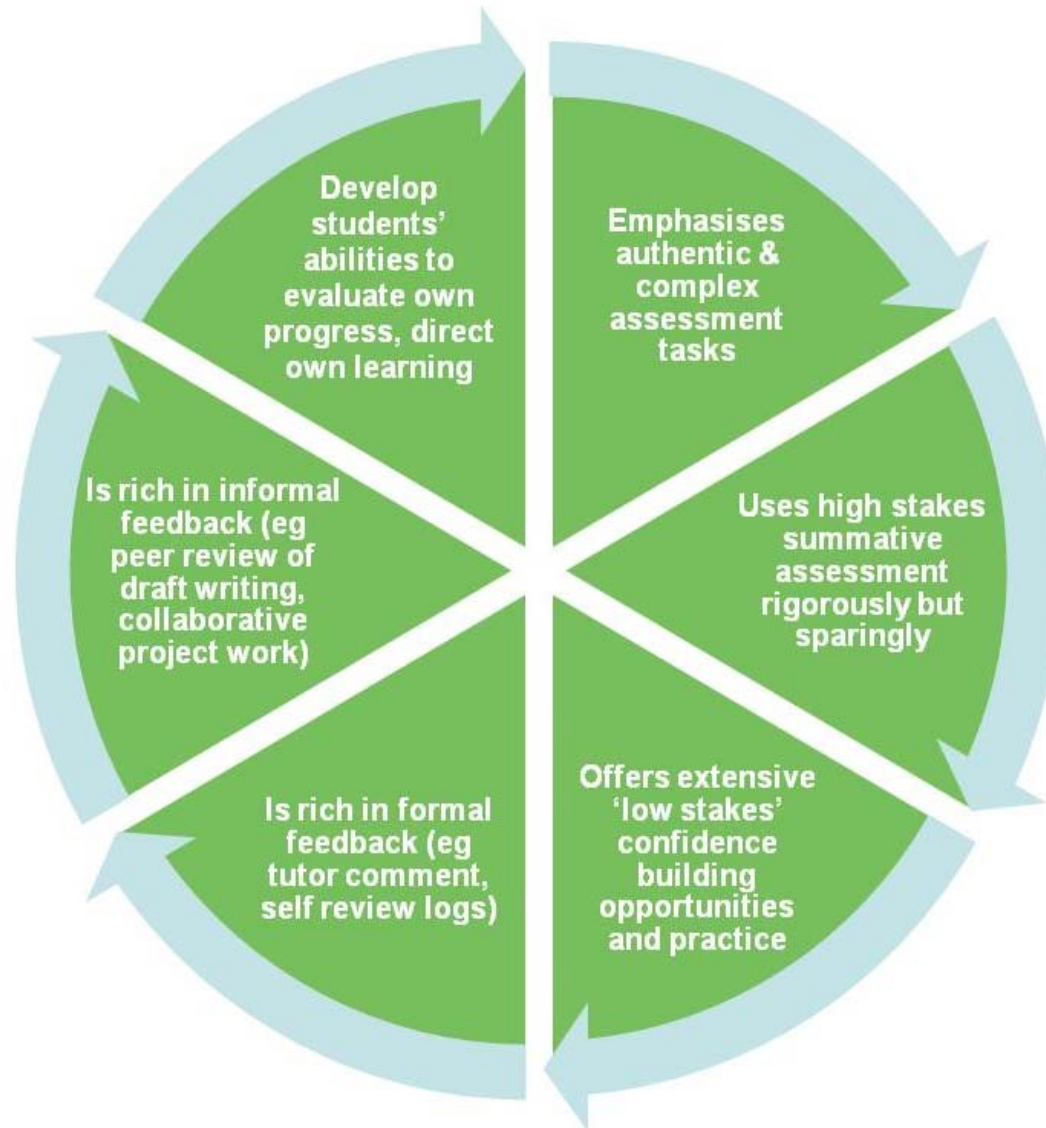# Re-engineering assessment and feedback practices

To stimulate

- Student Engagement
  - Students supported to act as participants/partners in learning, via active involvement in and commitment to study

- Student Empowerment
  - Students supported to exercise increasing levels of control over own learning via self-monitoring and self-regulation

Assessment for Learning Core conditions

Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY

- Develop students' abilities to evaluate own progress, direct own learning
- Emphasises authentic & complex assessment tasks
- Uses high stakes summative assessment rigorously but sparingly
- Offers extensive 'low stakes' confidence building opportunities and practice
- Is rich in formal feedback (eg tutor comment, self review logs)
- Is rich in informal feedback (eg peer review of draft writing, collaborative project work)

Can we design
AfL environments which…

1. emphasise complex and authentic assessment tasks?

2. use high stakes assessment rigorously but sparingly?

3. create opportunities for low stakes practice and confidence-building?

…and can we design AfL environments which

4. Are rich in formal feedback to improve learning?

5. Provide opportunities for informal/authentic feedback via participation?

6. Enable students to develop the skills and capacities for evaluative judgment and reflection?

HOW MIGHT WE (RE)DESIGN ASSESSMENT TASKS TO PROMOTE ENGAGEMENT?
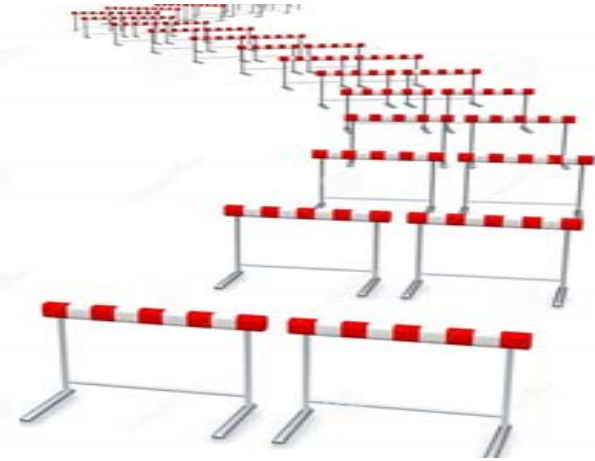
- *There's no obligation, you're writing for a set task…and once that's been achieved then that's it. You just copy down the books in a different language. (Joint Hons)*

- *You just think, let me remember this for the next hour or so…[so I can] throw enough jelly at the wall during the exam [hoping] some of it will stick…(Engineering)*

One CETL response: project-led summative tasks

Live briefs to create
- – Educational materials
- – Engineering solutions

Authentic learning environments- all teaching sessions built gradually, with 'on-display' products and work-in-progress.

Deep approaches and sense-making

"I put so much effort into this, read loads, you had to. With this you can't just sit there and take the notes, you have to make sense of it...to produce something that gets the message over."

"It's thinking.....It's more analytical."

(Joint Hons)

"You have to see for yourself, make decisions. You've got some techniques and you have to think about whether you use them or not. I think that's what you have to do in a job.....And so I think it's more helpful for reality."

(Engineering)

In sum……

What assessment tasks do **you** use or could you use in future that are meaningful to students

- beyond 'accruing marks/grades'?
- in longer term?

HOW MIGHT WE (RE)DESIGN FEEDBACK **PROCESSES** TO PROMOTE STUDENT **ENGAGEMENT** WITH FEEDBACK?

The value of feedback

'...*it has long been recognised, by researchers and practitioners alike, that feedback plays a decisive role in learning and development, within and beyond formal educational settings. We learn faster, and much more effectively, when we have a clear sense of how well we are doing and what we might do in order to improve*.'
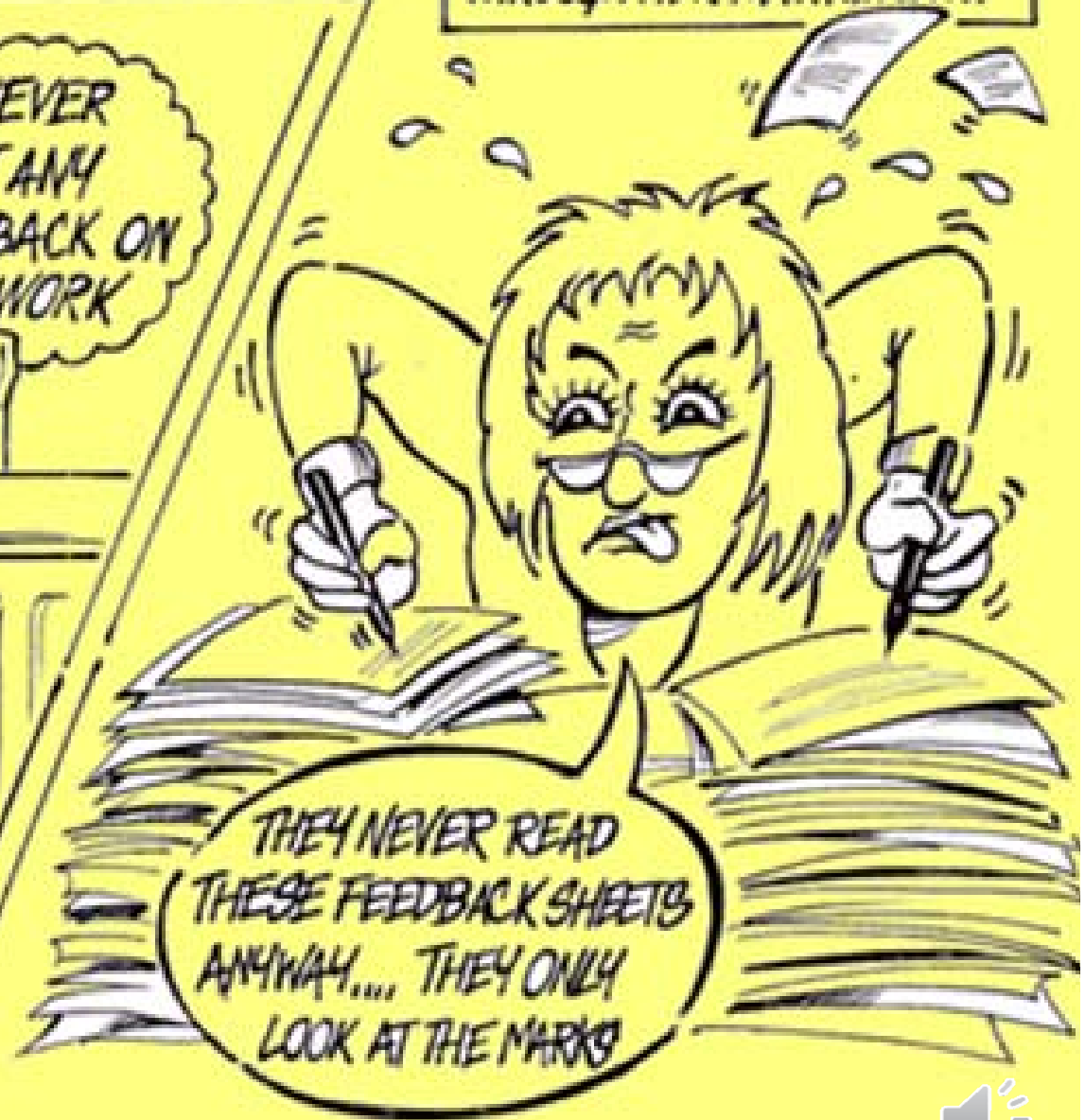
(Hounsell, 2003: 67)

'Old paradigm' notions of HE feedback

- '...all too often feedback is conceptualised simply as the provision of information…' (Sambell et al, 2013:73)
- …as 'monologue' (Nicol, 2010)
- …as 'a matter of information transmission'
- …'an episodic mechanism delivered by teachers'
(Boud & Molloy, 2013)
- …as a gift/product that is given/provided (Henderson et al 2019)
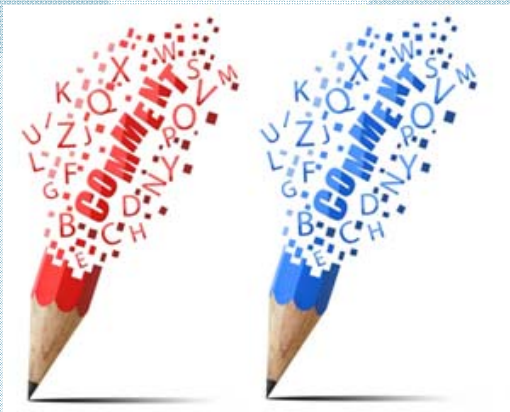
Problems associated with old paradigm feedback practices…

Timing: Summative commenting seems like a perversely belated revelation of things that should have been made clearer earlier

(Crook, Gross and Dymott, 2006)

- *"The problem is, you can hand in an assignment thinking that you've got it...but sometimes you really haven't...and there's no way of checking that. "*

Difficulties in understanding and actioning feedback:

- *"If I'd known how to 'Be more critical' I'd have done it!"*

A lot of energy has focused on improving feedback delivery
Common strategies to address feedback 'problems' have included

- Trying to reduce the 'turnaround' time for feedback on summative work

- Improving detail, modalities and delivery of teacher comments on summative assessments
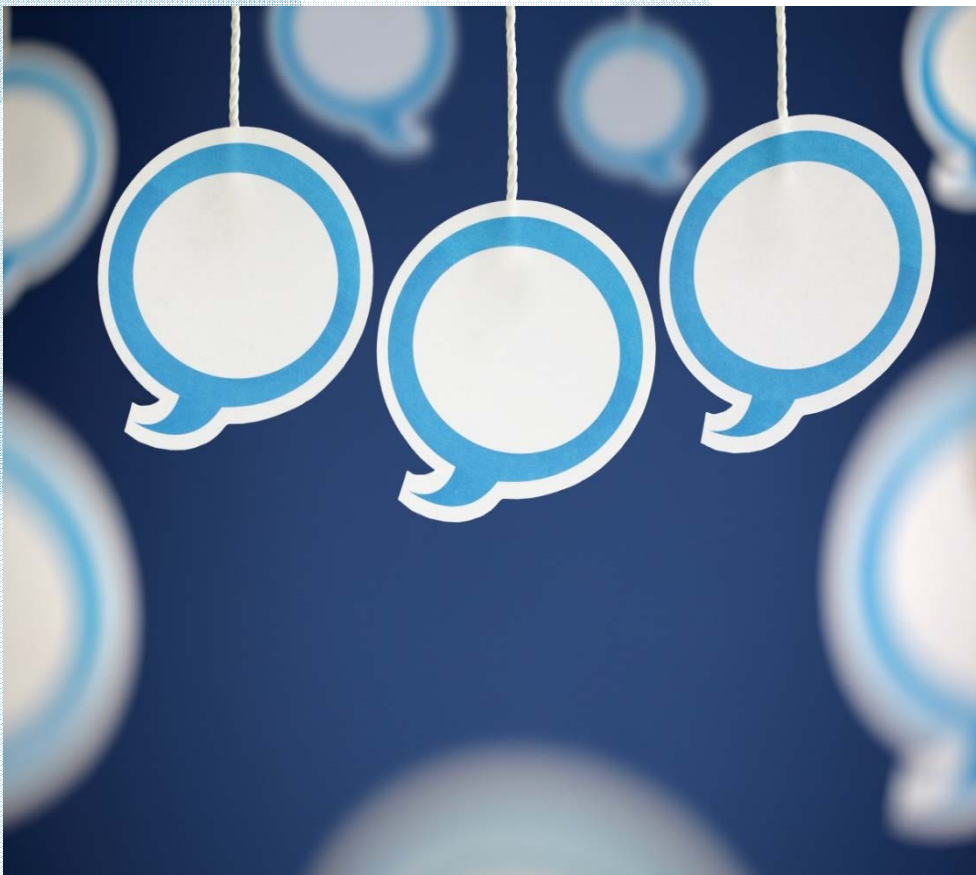
The need to rethink models of feedback (Boud & Molloy, 2013)

Unless there's a perceptible **influence**

- i.e. unless students actually **engage** with feedback and **use** the information to lead to further learning in some way-

it is simply '**dangling data**'

Rethink feedback from product ➡️

embedded **processes**
(Sambell, 2011)

Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY

'New paradigm' approaches emphasise active role of learners

"Feedback is a process in which learners use information from various sources to enhance their performance or learning strategies"

(Carless, after Boud and Molloy, 2018)

Rethinking feedback in higher education:
an assessment for learning perspective

Kay Sambell, Northumbria University

How do we **design** in developmental activities and dialogue which

Offer plentiful and rich opportunities for students to *engage* proactively with formal feedback processes to 'close the loop'?

Some CETL tactics- building formal feedback into teaching

- Timing to enable application:
  - providing actionable comments on assignment plans/sections
  - breaking tasks down into smaller linked stages so feedback applies to subsequent task
  - work-in-progress presentations (with checklists)
- Technology:
  - Using online self-testing facilities with opportunities for students to seek feedback
  - Clickers in class
  - Feedback portfolios/logbooks
- Feedback First
  - students choose when to receive teacher comments

'Feedback first' approach highly prized by students

Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY

"[The teacher] has actually sat down and said 'this is where you're going wrong, you might want to try this.' And I really like that. That helped me a lot."

"She would help you to know where you had gone wrong and she'd help you to fix it, rather than just to say 'That's where you went wrong'."

Other approaches- informal feedback via participation and interactions in everyday learning activities/communities

Authentic feedback- learning to see

As 'seeing' where you are now

*"It's something that you've done instantly.. and you talk about it instantly, and then you get feedback instantly…so **you can see** if you need to alter or change."*

As seeking

*"without **talking to people** and **explaining your ideas** to other people, **you can't work out** whether you're on the right lines…you're sort of left in the dark."*

# HOW CAN WE EXPLICITLY SUPPORT STUDENTS TO DEVELOP THEIR EVALUATIVE EXPERTISE?

Key premise of AfL (Sadler, 1989)

For students to be able to improve, they must develop the capacity to monitor their own work during actual production

Unless this capacity is developed, students can't use information about how successfully something is being done in order to close the gap between current and desired performance

Close The Loop
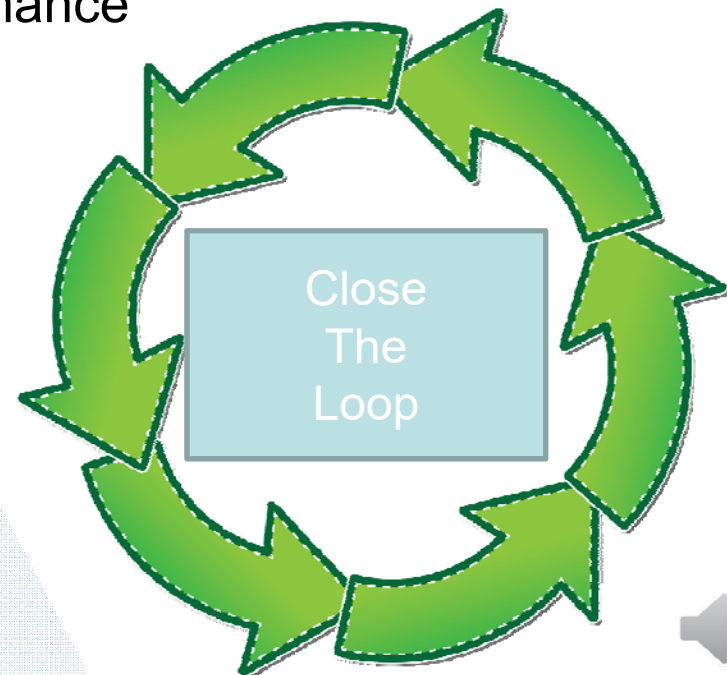
Indispensable conditions (Sadler 1989)

- **The student** comes to hold a concept of quality roughly similar to that held by the teacher

- Is able to **monitor continuously** the quality of what is being produced during the act of production itself

- Has a repertoire of alternative moves or **strategies** from which to draw

Some CETL tactics- involving students proactively in evaluative processes (Tai et al, 2017)

- Students self assessing (reviewing) their work against agreed criteria (to compare their judgments with staff)
- Peer review (Nicol, 2014; Sambell & Sambell 2019)
- Students as partners e.g. co-creating criteria
- Analysing and discussing exemplars (Hendry, 2013; Sambell, 2011, 2020; Smyth & Carless, 2020)

Exemplars-based workshop

- **Large numbers** of Y1 students

- Students **produce short text answer** on threshold concept in advance

- Workshop involved collective analysis of 3 exemplars (previous students' answers) plus own

Students' views of learning goals…the value of discussing concrete examples.

"I think seeing it just makes you understand it more. Like, someone can stand there and say, 'You shouldn't do this and that' but until you've actually seen it then you don't know what that looks like."

The importance of the process of *comparison (after Nicol, 2019)*

What makes peer review unique is that <u>*before*</u> reviewing the work of peers, the student will have spent considerable time and effort in producing their own response to the same tasks themselves

– so reviewing harnesses an inherent reflective process whereby students compare their own work with the work they're reviewing

Transformed roles for students in the feedback process

"I used rather informal language, and I saw I have to change that."

"When we discussed this task in class I realised that what I had written didn't focus on the question, and I had looked more at socialisation rather than social construction. It was this that made me read around the subject more."

"Having to comment on someone else's presentation makes you think a lot more, made you more aware…by looking at other people's work you were seeing what you're good at and what you need to improve on…."

A striking contrast with students' conceptions of feedback in the earlier Case Study...

- Student positioned self as reliant on tutor to identify action and change

    – *'It is very helpful that we can write a draft for [the tutor] who checks it and then we can write it'.*

    – *She is very supportive of us and she's telling us what we should or shouldn't do.*

To what extent do you design in formal opportunities for reflection, self and/or peer evaluation in your courses?
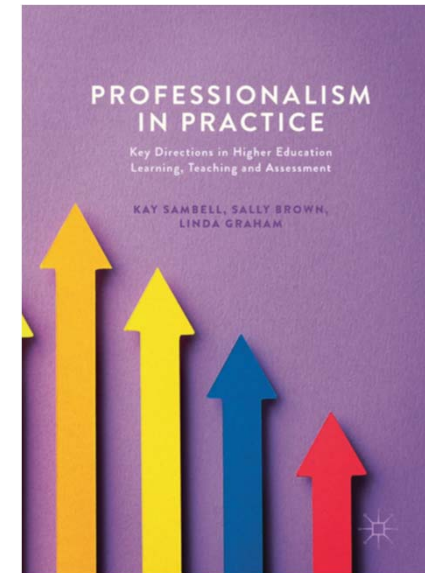
– How do you support and actively engage students to develop their understandings of goals, criteria and standards?

Thanks for listening! Contact me

k.sambell@napier.ac.uk
profkaysambell@gmail.com

Try our Quick Guides
https://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/dlte/Pages/QuickGuides.aspx

Department of Learning and Teaching Enhancement

@kay_sambell

Please join us at the next

Assessment in Higher Education (AHE) Conference

June 30th-July 2nd 2021, Manchester, UK.

Keynote speakers: David Boud,
                          Naomi Winstone
                          Paul Ashwin

Keep an eye on the AHE website
https://aheconference.com/   @Aheconference