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## Digital Module #33: Fairness in Classroom Assessment: Tensions and Dimensions

Amir Rasooli

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The following scenarios are copied from a recently developed Classroom Assessment Fairness Inventory (Rasooli, 2021). This inventory includes five scenarios: (1) groupwork, (2) exam, (3) grading, (4) cheating, and (5) feedback. To do this activity,

- You will read each scenario and analyze if the teacher was fair or unfair in their responses to various aspects of the scenario.
- You will describe what your rationales were and what underpinning principles of fairness (outlined in social psychology theory) guided the teachers' actions.
- For example, for the first item in groupwork scenario, do you think Mr. Chu was fair? If yes, why? If no, why? In case of being fair, what principle of fairness guided Mr. Chu's action and in case of unfairness what principle of fairness was violated by Mr. Chu?

Once you finished this activity, please watch section 4 of the ITEMS Module on fairness in classroom assessment to see the responses for items in each scenario.

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**Scenario 1. Groupwork**

Mr. Chu highly values student groupwork. Based on his initial assessments, Mr. Chu formed each group with three students from different ability levels: struggling, average, and high performing students. He believed that high performing students contribute to the learning of other group members. Each group worked on their projects and prepared a final presentation. Mr. Chu has left it to groups to discuss how to distribute workload and allowed students to discuss with him if they had issues over group dynamics. As a response to students' questions about assessment, Mr. Chu provided an overview of the project to students but not a rubric showing how he will assess students' groupwork. Mr. Chu encouraged group members to work hard as all group members will receive the same grades as a reflection of group performance and cooperation. Several who were not satisfied with their grades appealed, but Mr. Chu did not accept their complaints.

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**Actions**

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**Relevant  
underlying  
principle**

1. Mr. Chu selected group members based on mixed ability.
  2. Mr. Chu did not provide students a choice in selecting their group members.
  3. Mr. Chu allowed students' complaints over group dynamics.
  4. Mr. Chu was not detailed in communicating how he will assess students' groupwork.
  5. Mr. Chu gave the same grades to all group members.
  6. Mr. Chu did not give individual grades for each group member based on their contributions and learning.
  7. Mr. Chu did not justify his grades to students who appealed.
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**Scenario 2. Exam**

Mr. Ahmed announced that the class would have an exam the day before winter break (in 5 days). Students preferred moving the exam date because they had many assignments for other subjects that were also due on the same date. Even so, Mr. Ahmed was firm on his decision as moving the exam date back would create more intensive workload later in the year. Mr. Ahmed did not explicitly state what would be on the exam. However, he did include a mix of easy and difficult questions to give all students an opportunity to show their learning. He also provided accommodations (e.g., more time) to students with disabilities and English language learners. In general, Mr. Ahmed is a lenient teacher in grading compared with other teachers in the school who teach the same subject. On the exam, all students complained about two questions that were not covered during the course. Mr. Ahmed harshly responded that students should be able to answer the two questions from what had been taught. For a few students who missed the exam date, Mr. Ahmed decided to give another exam opportunity after winter break.

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**Actions**

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**Relevant  
underlying  
principle**

1. Mr. Ahmed held firm on the exam date.
  2. Mr. Ahmed did not explicitly state what would be on the exam.
  3. Mr. Ahmed included in the exam both easy to difficult questions.
  4. Students with disabilities and English language learners received accommodations for the exam (e.g., more writing time).
  5. Mr. Ahmed graded his students more leniently than other teachers.
  6. Mr. Ahmed did not remove the two questions on the content that were not taught before.
  7. Mr. Ahmed did not respond to students' complaints with a respectful tone.
  8. Mr. Ahmed gave another exam opportunity to students who missed the exam.
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### Scenario 3. Grading

Ms. Mendes had students from diverse backgrounds in her classroom. She treated all her students respectfully during classroom teaching, assessment, and interactions. Ms. Mendes informed students that she would give grades based on student achievement. 70% of students' grades were from multiple tests during the course plus 30% for students' individual essays. Ms. Mendes communicated test results in one week after handing the test in. Due to busy schedule, she would sometimes allow students to appeal their grades if there was enough time in class. She would fully explain her grading for students who spoke up looking for their grade adjustments. At the end of the course, Ms. Mendes adjusted the grades of failing students with at-risk backgrounds to support their success. She also increased marks for a few students to ensure admission into their desired universities. However, she lowered the grades of a few disruptive students who interrupted the classroom learning.

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#### Actions

#### Relevant underlying principle

1. Ms. Mendes treated students respectfully during classroom assessment.
  2. Ms. Mendes largely considered student achievement of learning objectives in her grading.
  3. Ms. Mendes detailed her grading criteria, with test scores making up 70% of a student's grade.
  4. Ms. Mendes communicated test results in one week after handing the test in.
  5. Ms. Mendes would sometimes allow students to discuss their grades if there was enough time in class.
  6. Ms. Mendes gave adequate justification for students who spoke up for their grades.
  7. Ms. Mendes adjusted the grades of failing students with at-risk backgrounds.
  8. Ms. Mendes considered students' future university admissions to adjust grades.
  9. Ms. Mendes considered student misbehavior (e.g., disruptions) in her grading.
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#### Scenario 4. Cheating

Ms. Johnston is very strict when she catches a student cheating. However, she did not tell students her policy on cheating at the beginning of the year. One student was caught cheating on an exam and Ms. Johnston decided to give the student a grade of zero. Ms. Johnston did not give the student an opportunity to explain the reasons for cheating before making her decisions. She explained to the class that cheating is unfair to other students and asked the student to leave the classroom. The exam constituted 20% of students' final grade. After the exam, she met with the student and explained that cheating is ethically wrong, is unfair in relation to the classmates, and she would punish anyone who cheats. The student provided a reason for their behavior and apologized.

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#### Actions

#### Relevant underlying principle

1. Ms. Johnston was not transparent about her cheating policy at the beginning of the course.
  2. Ms. Johnston did not give the student an opportunity to explain the reasons for cheating before making her decision to give zero.
  3. Ms. Johnston gave a zero because cheating is unfair to other students' efforts.
  4. Ms. Johnston gave a zero because cheating is ethically wrong.
  5. Ms. Johnston gave a zero to signal that anyone who cheats should be punished for this action.
  6. Ms. Johnston asked the student to leave the classroom in front of other students.
  7. Ms. Johnston explained her cheating decision to the student.
  8. Ms. Johnston did not forgive the student's cheating this time.
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**Scenario 5. Feedback**

Mr. Dembe has asked students to write an essay about their science lab project. He has shared with students a clear rubric that he will use to assess students' essays. Four days after the essay submission deadline, Mr. Dembe got back to students with his feedback and expressed that students can contact him for further discussion of his feedback. Students noticed that Mr. Dembe gave more feedback to students with good quality essays as well as his favorite students than students who had handed in essays that were of low quality. Mr. Dembe harshly explained that he had given variable feedback on the essays based on the amount of effort he deemed each student had put in completing essays.

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**Actions**

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**Relevant  
underlying  
principle**

1. Mr. Dembe provided a clear rubric for assessing students' essays.
  2. Mr. Dembe provided feedback after four days of essay submissions.
  3. Mr. Dembe gave students a chance to further discuss his feedback.
  4. Mr. Dembe provided feedback based on the amount of effort each student has put in the work.
  5. Mr. Dembe did not provide more feedback to students who had weaker performance.
  6. Mr. Dembe did not treat students respectfully in his feedback procedure.
  7. Mr. Dembe gave more feedback to his favorite students.
  8. Mr. Dembe explained that his feedback procedure was based on the amount of effort each student has put in.
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