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**Abstract**

Assessing student learning in ways that offer students, institutions and systems with sound information is a considerable challenge for higher education. Despite demonstrable progress, a disconnect remains between methods used for assessing learning, improvement and accountability. This muddled situation is illustrated through a review of contemporary practice in the USA, Canada, Australia, the UK and New Zealand. To advance research and practice, this paper contributes a structured set of criteria that practitioners can use to evaluate whether an assessment functions effectively across different levels of practice. These technical and practical criteria touch on issues such as sampling, the viability of aggregation, reporting and cost?benefit considerations. The paper tests these criteria by considering their capacity to drive multi-level improvement in education quality. It is contended that the criteria provide perspective and structure for reconciling the quantitative assessment of higher education quality at different levels of practice.(HRK / Abstract

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