

Chapter 3

Multimodal Assessment in Higher Education: Reflections From Student Perspectives

Dorothy Cooshna-Naik
University of Mauritius, Mauritius

Linda Van Laren
University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Claudia Mitchell
McGill University, Canada

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the implementation of an alternative form of assessment at a higher education institution (HEI) in Mauritius. As part of their module entitled ‘Mauritian History,’ a group of first year undergraduate students of Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities were given the opportunity to work on a multimodal assignment which required them to produce a history-related documentary style video. The chapter draws upon students’ written reflections collected at different stages of the assignment to share their experiences as creators/producers of knowledge along with their views on this alternative form of assessment at higher education (HE) level. At the end of the assignment, it was found that despite challenges, students felt they gained a lot in terms of content knowledge, personal growth, and emotional development. The implications and recommendations for digitally enhanced multimodal assessment at HE level are presented.

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment forms an integral part of students' academic journey as well as that of educators. Through assessment, educators can work on the improvement of their teaching strategies and also improve students' learning. The teaching and learning process includes students' evaluation at different key stages to fulfil specific purposes. Within HE settings, most programmes of study are assessed using coursework (formative assessment) and written and/or practical exams (summative assessment). While summative assessment acts as a mechanism to certify the level of achievement/performance of students at the end of a course, formative assessment enables students to engage in tests and assignments of different types and receive constructive feedback from the educator. Through such feedback, students can judge and reflect on their own achievements and what they should do to improve their learning. Across the literature, there have been ongoing discussions about aspects related to assessment practices and their effectiveness in supporting student learning (Areekkuzhiyil, 2019; Fook & Sidhu, 2014; Rawlusk, 2018). Researchers such as Boud (2000) addressed the notion of sustainable assessment as one "that meets the needs of the present and prepares students to meet their own future learning needs" (p. 1). This resonates with the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), an integral part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) on quality education which contends that learning should go beyond educational needs and provide opportunities for students to develop "the knowledge, skills, and values they need to thrive as global citizens in the twenty-first century" (UNESCO, 2015). According to Boud and Falchikov (2006), assessment should not only serve the purpose of certification and to facilitate learning, but also consider "assessment to foster learning throughout life" (p. 400).

Despite the increasing call for a reform in assessment practices to promote the development of broader life skills and attributes as highlighted by scholars in the literature (Baleni, 2015, Gilles et al., 2011, Postareff et al., 2012; Masters, 2013), some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) still appear to prioritise the traditional or conventional forms of assessment such as paper-based formal tests or exams over other alternative assessment methods which take into consideration not just students' cognitive abilities, but also the demonstration of students' skills and competencies. Hence, it is important for educators to shift their focus on assessment *of* learning to assessment *for* learning to optimise the potential of assessment.

This chapter puts forward the idea of assessment *for* learning and in particular multimodal assessment within a higher education context. It draws on findings from a pedagogical intervention implemented in a first year undergraduate History course entitled '*Mauritian History*', included in the first year of three programmes of study from the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities of a Higher Education

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