Chapter 11
Teaching for Epistemological Change:
Self–Direction through Self–Assessment

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ABSTRACT

As higher education teachers, the authors are committed to supporting students in their epistemological development, specifically in their transition towards self-direction. In this chapter, they share their experience of using self-assessment in a Teacher Training Degree course as a way to both enhance self-direction and assess its development. A thematic analysis of the self-assessments of a sample of 30 students is carried out, and four themes are identified: 1) the degree of authorship, 2) the degree of elaboration, 3) "taking notice of" subtle levels of analysis, and 4) the identification of temporal milestones throughout the course. These themes enable a different pattern of mental complexity to be identified, a complexity which is understood as evidence of students' different degrees of self-direction. The findings are discussed in the light of developmental constructivist theories. In addition, some implications for education regarding the current debates on self-assessment literature are presented.

INTRODUCTION

The deepest order of change that human beings are capable of demonstrating is epistemological change. A change in epistemology means transforming one's way of experiencing the world. (Keeney, 1983, p.7).

Nowadays society requires individuals to have complex personal and interpersonal competences in order to be successful workers, learners, and citizens (Drago-Severson, 2011; Kegan, 1994; King & Siddiqui, 2011). These demands, which involve being adaptable, reflective, autonomous, self-regulated and capable of communicating and co-operating with others (Dochy, Segers, & Buehl, 1999), are underlain by the need for individuals to develop increasingly complex ways of knowing. That is to say, by the need to experience what has been termed as epistemological development (Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 2000; Taylor & Cranton, 2013).

From an educational perspective, the challenges and supports needed to enhance such epistemological development are not provided by transmission-oriented approaches, which usually put the emphasis on students' reproducing factual knowledge (Gow & Kember, 1990). In this sense, higher education involves new challenges for the students, such as the demand to be more autonomous and active learners (Pérez, Shim, King, & Baxter-Magolda, 2015). Some educational practices that have shown to promote more independent ways of learning are the following: engagement in research, service learning, intergroup dialogue and active pedagogies that include self-assessment procedures (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005).

Self-assessment, widely recognised as a challenge for higher education students, could be a good candidate to foster their epistemological development. As defined by Boud (1995), this kind of formative assessment has become more frequent in the context of higher education. Although self-assessment has been traditionally identified as a practice aimed at improving learners' assessment of their own competence and performance in the process of learning a discipline (Boud, 1995), recent investigations associate self-assessment with the enhancement of students' metacognitive competence (Mok, Lung, Cheng, Cheung, & Ng, 2006). In addition to this, self-assessment has also been related to the promotion of lifelong learning (Boud, 1995) and self-regulation (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002). However, few studies include students' development explicitly within the scope of self-assessment. With the exception of works like Yorke's (2003), self-assessment is still understood as a competence instead of as a qualitative change in the way of making sense of one's experience.

In this regard, we posit that a theory of formative assessment should include knowledge related to learning and assessment, but also to students' development. As Yorke (2003, p. 487) states, "a formal assessment task is constructed by the assessor, bearing in mind the structure and progression of the subject discipline(s) involved, an appreciation of the sequencing of intellectual and moral development progression of students (...), and a *knowledge of the current level of intellectual development of his or her students*" (emphasis ours).

This conception of self-assessment as a developmental resource fits with a constructivist approach to learning. From this perspective, learning involves a change not only in *what* we know, but also in *how* we know. This is the core idea of theories such as Transformative Learning, which depicts learning as a process of examining, questioning, and revising our understandings, assumptions and expectations about the world in the light of new experiences which might challenge our previous assumptions and guide future action (Mezirow, 2000). In this sense, transformative learning involves an epistemological change rather than a mere change in behavioural or competence repertoires, or an increase in the quantity of knowledge (Kegan, 2000).

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