

Chapter 13

Peer assessment in an Online Context: What Do Students Say?

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ABSTRACT

In this work, making use of Tinoca, Oliveira and Pereira (2013) framework for assessment quality in digital contexts, we discuss the students' perspective about self and peer assessment practices in on-line environments. This research is based in the analysis of the students' perceptions in a fully online master's course being offered in a distance education university since 2007. We discuss the students' representations since that date until the present, reflecting on their roles as assessors, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they developed to overcome them. The results illustrate the participants' perceptions of self and peer assessment as innovative practices. There is a strong tendency throughout this period towards greater confidence with these practices, and increased trust in their peers' feedback and competence to share the assessment responsibility. Moreover, the transparency promoted by the sharing during the process and of the final products is recognized as crucial to support the participants' reflection process and competence development.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we discuss assessment issues in online Higher Education contexts. The most recent technological developments present in these contexts, have greatly influenced not only instructional methods and learning models, but have also had a very specific impact on assessment design.

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Within this framework, we have witnessed the emergence of philosophy of assessment as a catalyst for student regulated learning. This is in direct opposition with traditional, outdated perspectives that focus mainly on the measurement and ranking characteristics of assessment. In fact, there have been several recent studies emphasizing the benefits of an assessment *for* learning perspective (Brown, 2006; Dierick & Dochy, 2001; JISC, 2010; Nicol, 2007; Sadler & Good, 2006; Sainsbury & Walker, 2007). In this context, the authors developed a conceptual framework, integrating these different perspectives on an edumetric approach of assessment for learning, to support the development of competence assessment strategies in technologically enhanced contexts (Tinoca, Oliveira & Pereira, 2013).

This research is based on a longitudinal study undertaken at Universidade Aberta (Open University) in Portugal, on a course called “*Using ICT for Learning and Teaching*” from the Master’s program on “*Educational Communication and Multimedia*” between the years 2007 and 2015. During this time there were a total of 5 editions of the program that were used for this research. Within this course, we specifically researched the digital assessment strategies being used, and for this chapter we particularly focused on competence assessment using self and peer-assessment strategies during group projects.

Also, this research has been supported by the assess.he project (Pereira et al., 2015, Tinoca, Oliveira & Pereira, 2013; Pereira, Oliveira & Tinoca, 2010), where different types of collaborative assessment practices in online courses have been studied. With this goal, we have gathered data from students’ online interactions on discussion forums, the work produced by the students (both individually and in small groups), self- and peer-assessment results attained by the students, and answers to questionnaires applied during the different stages of the investigation.

In this particular case we are interested in exploring questions related to self- and peer-assessment strategies during group work in online Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Two main research questions were asked: How do Higher Education students perceive self and peer-assessment practices within an assessment for learning framework? How can self and peer-assessment practices contribute to the quality of competence assessment in Higher Education online environments?

In this chapter, we start by tackling the new challenges for e-assessment in general, and for self- and peer-assessment in digital contexts in particular to introduce the theoretical underpinning for our work. After, we present the methodology used for the study, followed by the analysis and discussion of the attained results. We finish with a discussion of the main conclusions arising from the study.

2. NEW CHALLENGES FOR E-ASSESSMENT

The current widespread of technological devices available to educational institutions, particularly for communicating and interacting, has fueled the growing use of elearning models, both in blended formats and completely online. In this context, it is ever more pressing to rethink current assessment models, in order to (re)design them, taking full advantage of these environments features. This shift has been labelled as electronic assessment (e-assessment) or digital assessment (JISC, 2010).

At the same time, we have witnessed the recognition of the inadequacies of traditional assessment strategies to foster student learning, as a consequence of their excessive focus on ranking and classification. As a response to this problem, we have seen a large growth over the last three decades of alternative assessment strategies. Dierick and Dochy (2001) call this new culture an *assessment culture*, opposed to the traditional *testing culture*. Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997) illustrate this change in the assessment paradigm as a shift from final written exams to continuous assessment, from teacher centered teaching

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