Chapter I

Assessment is as Assessment Does: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Online Assessment and Measurement

Jeanette M. Bartley, University of Technology, Jamaica

Abstract

With the increasing adoption of advanced education technologies, such as Internet-based communications, there are greater demands for more effective, flexible, interactive, customized and just-in-time online instructional and assessment systems. As institutions rush to digitize, virtualize and globalize their campuses, there remains the significant issue of the ability to measure outcomes as a means of determining the credibility of technology-mediated learning experiences. This chapter addresses selected concerns including the distinction between online assessment and traditional assessment; the relevance of authentic and alternative assessment; the practical considerations relating to security, integrity, validity, and reliability of assessment; emerging principles of good practice relating to quality
indicators, benchmarks and criteria for effective online assessment; and the relative significance of online assessment trends to various drivers and stakeholders.

Introduction

With the increasing adoption of advanced education technologies beyond print, audio, and television media to more sophisticated forms of interactive electronic communication networks over the last two decades, the traditional orientation to teaching and learning is intensely challenged (Berge, 2000; Harisim, 1990; Rogers, 2000). This phenomenon has created an increasing demand for more effective, flexible, interactive, customized, and just-in-time instructional systems to keep pace with knowledge explosion and socioeconomic trends of a service-oriented global marketplace (Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Phipps & Merisotis, 2000; Whitis, 2001). Several authors suggest that the most extensive developments during the 1990s may have taken place in the area of teaching on the Internet, with electronic access to course materials (Berge, 2000; Drummond, 2003; Mason, 1998; Moore, Winograd, & Lange, 2001).

Mason (1998) observed that communication, whether synchronous or asynchronous, and whether one-to-one or many-to-many, has become easier, with the availability of Web-based conferencing systems providing Windows interface to messaging. The ability to provide asynchronous, interactive learning activities has also become the signature characteristic that sets Internet-based distance education apart from most of the other technologies (Phipps & Merisotis, 2000; Liang & Kim, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Whitis, 2001).

There are increasing references in the literature to the digital generation and information age, reflecting how today’s students perceive their learning environments as boundless, despite traditional expectations (Barone, 2003; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Tapscott, 1998). “They tend to use physical space differently than prior generations, and they blur the boundaries between physical and cyber space” (Barone, 2003, p. 42). These behaviors have immediate implications for campus architectural design and for all aspects of student services, including policies relating to the definition of a course and how ownership of learning is determined and assessed. In this digital age, students’ access to information and their expectations of when, where, how, and how fast they learn, are motivating faculty members to change their methods of instruction, interaction responsiveness, and approaches to assessment (Barone, 2003; Bober, 1998; Drummond, 2003; Palloff & Pratt, 1999).
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