

Chapter 6

Using Student Assessment Choice and eAssessment to Achieve Self-Regulated Learning

Cath Ellis

University of Huddersfield, UK

Sue Folley

University of Huddersfield, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how we can harness technology to foster self-regulated learning in assessment practices. Traditionally innovation in assessment lags behind that in other areas of teaching and learning, however, it is important to make sure that assessment methods and practices are aligned with learning objectives. For assessment to be a beneficial learning experience for students it is important that they are afforded more autonomy and agency over what, when and how they are assessed. This chapter reflects on the ‘problem’ that assessment and feedback presents and on what the research is showing academics need to concentrate. Secondly, it considers how eAssessment tools can provide a way forward to achieving these objectives and helping students to develop more self-regulated learning strategies. Finally the authors will explore how the use of these tools can allow students greater autonomy over the whole assessment process, and the essential role that technology may play in achieving this.

INTRODUCTION

In a fast-paced world it is becoming increasingly likely that a significant proportion of what stu-

dents learn as undergraduate students will be out of date or obsolete by the time they finish their professional working careers. In such a world, which Barnett (2008) describes as both ‘uncertain’ and ‘super-complex,’ it is no longer enough for students to learn ‘facts’ and ‘information’. As

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Dochy et al. (2008) put it: 'today's knowledge community expects graduates not only to have a specific knowledge base but to be able to apply this knowledge to solve complex problems in an efficient way' (p. 87). Being able to find, manage and evaluate information and process it into knowledge is becoming an increasingly important graduate attribute across all disciplines. As many scholars have pointed out, empowering students to become self-regulated learners is vital for their achieving this (M Boekaerts, 1999; M. Boekaerts & Simons, 1995; Kurtz & Weinert, 1989; Weinert, Schrader, & Helmke, 1989).

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) has become an increasingly important concept in education studies in recent years. Zimmerman & Schunk (1989) define SRL as self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions, that students systematically orient toward attaining goals they have developed or value. The growing interest in SRL has occurred partly in response to the changing nature of knowledge, information and professional work, and partly because of increasingly successful attempts by governments to widen participation in post-compulsory education. Self-regulated learning, therefore, marks a significant shift away from the traditional *modus operandi* of Higher Education which has been dominated by instructional pedagogical paradigms (characterised by 'chalk-and-talk' and end-loaded, summative assessment). There is considerable literature exploring and outlining the means by which these changes may come about but achieving them will be futile if they are not matched with changes in assessment and feedback strategy that also both encourage and reward SRL.

As many leading scholars have pointed out, assessment is the single most important factor influencing student behaviour and attitude (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; see for instance Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Dochy et al., 2008; Scouller, 1998; Snyder, 1971). The influence is so strong that the negative 'backwash effect' of assessment that Elton (cited in Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 169) identified and

Biggs has developed further, whereby assessment sends undesirable messages to students, means that even the most brilliant teaching and learning can be negated by weak assessment design. It is this principle which is at the heart of Biggs' very influential theory of 'constructive alignment' whereby teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks are systematically aligned with the intended learning outcomes according to the learning activities required in the outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 7). What this means for self-regulated learning is that it is not enough to design learning environments, activities and outcomes that encourage and empower it without appropriately designed assessment tasks that also encourage SRL.

This chapter is interested in exploring the key aspects of SRL in terms of assessment and feedback. As Boekaerts has pointed out, choice is one of the hallmarks of SRL, alongside accessibility and adaptability (M Boekaerts, 1999, p. 451). This chapter will focus, therefore, on the role that student assessment choice can play in terms of empowering students to become self-regulated learners and how eAssessment tools can be used to achieve this. For the purposes of this paper, we use the term eAssessment to mean electronic and/or online tools which can be used for student assessment. This is not limited to Computer Marked Assessment (such as automatically assessed multiple choice questions) and includes Tutor Marked Assessment which makes use of communication and information technology in some form. The context of this discussion is limited to the Higher Education sector, so focussing on adult learners.

BACKGROUND

As any student will tell you, assessment and feedback is important and has a huge influence on their perceptions and behaviour. Orsmond et al (2002) state that 'Assessment tends to shape every part of the student learning experience' (p.24).

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