Chapter 9
In Search of Elements to Organize Assessments Remotely in Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

The focus in this contribution is the challenge to develop an efficient and effective learning environment for student teachers, especially with respect to the remote organization of assessment and the remote support of internship for students who follow a distance education program. For both aspects it is examined whether the used methodologies/approaches are in line with the perceptions of different stakeholders (students/lecturers/supervisors). The results reveal that 1) the methodology/approach used to take an exam remotely is in line with perceptions of students, but 2) not all lecturers seem to be convinced about the necessity to give students in distance education control on time, pace and place to take their exams; and they have worries about the workload. Further, the participants perceive a highly led anticipatory reflection assignment as a good instrument to support internship remotely and it seems to be an efficient instrument to support remotely an internship of student teachers. Recommendations are restricted to some suggestions for further research on both aspects.

INTRODUCTION

The focus in this contribution is the challenge to develop an efficient and effective learning environment for student teachers, especially with respect to the remote organization of assessment and the remote support of internship for students who follow a distance education program.

The discussion of these two elements aims at taking into account at least two essential elements of a teacher education program through distance education in an university college in Flanders (Belgium).

Distance education at the university college where the studies in this chapter took place, is organized in five study areas, namely: commercial sciences, business management and informatics, health care, applied social studies, biotechnology and teacher education. The focus of the studies in this chapter is mainly on teacher education.

BACKGROUND

Elements of a Student Profile in Distance Education

Although distance learning already exists for more than 100 years, this type of education -by the rise of the internet- is more than ever topical (Mariën, 2006). Students often opt for distance education as it allows for the combination of work/care of family and study. For instance, the results of an online survey with 816 students who follow a distance education program in an university college in Flanders reveal that 33.5% (n=273) of these respondents combines (at least) a half time job with the care for family (with children) and their study. Only 3.1% (n=25) is unemployed and single (without children). The idea to support students who opt for distance education to combine work/care of family and study (and thus also work with leisure) refers to the concept 'weisure'. The combination of work and leisure gives 'weisure'. A consequence of the concept weisure is to offer students as much as possible to have control over their learning (cf. learner control).

Elements of Assessment in Distance Education

Students who choose distance learning to get a degree are assessed at different moments on different aspects before they get a degree. As learning outcomes refer to different competences, a program in higher education includes different forms of assessment. Assessments with diagnostic analysis of the strengths/weaknesses of a student and/or for selection/evaluation (Dousma, Horsten & Brants, 1997) are often called assessment of learning (Stiggins, 2002). Beside assessment of learning, Stiggens (2002) distinguishes assessment for learning. In short, the purpose of assessment for learning is to keep students learning and remain confident that they can continue to learn at productive levels if they keep trying to learn (Stiggens, 2002; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002). Stiggens (2002) points out that assessment of and assessment for learning are essential in higher education to maximize student achievement.

Organize Assessment Remotely in Distance Education

Allowing students (who choose distance learning to get a degree) to decide as much as possible where and when they study, supports them to combine work/care for family and study. However even in those situations, students are often expected to get to campus at fixed times; for instance to take exams.

Getting to campus at fixed times is not always easy for students, because:

1. They often have to cover large distances (Richards, 2006), and
2. The timing selected by lecturers for examination does not always suit the students.

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