Chapter 39
Assessment 'for' Learning:
Embedding Digital Literacy and Peer-Support of Learning Into an Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This chapter evaluates an assessment strategy designed to reinforce learning whilst supporting the learning of the whole student cohort, through development of multimedia learning resources. Once created and evaluated, the resources were shared online for students to use in their ongoing learning and revision. The majority of the resources designed by students used an unfamiliar form of technology, showing that digital natives were eager to learn new technological skills. The depth and challenge of the resources was considerable. The chapter investigates the activity of students during this assessment and evaluates their decision-making processes in the design of their learning resources. The analysis reveals that students were aware of how technology would impact on different learning styles, and of the needs of diverse learners. The key observation is that digital natives are a rich (and largely-untapped) resource for the development of materials that can support their learning and that of their peers.

INTRODUCTION

Learning and assessment typically are very closely entwined within the HE setting, and are becoming increasingly so. The outcomes of the learning process, as measured by assessment, are becoming increasingly important in the sector, for government statistics and the requirement to monitor student progress for employability. This may not be to the benefit of learning, or to the academy in general, but is a factor of contemporary education in both compulsory and post-compulsory education. The immediate tendency is to assess the learning that students have managed to achieve. However, a more-profound use of assessment is to use it to support the learning experience. Not just in driving engagement and in defining

the direction of learning, but for it to be an active benefit to the learning and studying experience (Price *et al,* 2011), turning assessment of learning into assessment *as* learning, or assessment *for* learning.

Aligning assessment with learning and with skills development is not a novel concept, but something which often gets overlooked (Price *et al.,* 2010; Biggs and Tang, 2003). The paradigm shift needs to move from assessment merely testing knowledge and understanding, to being an integral part of the learning experience (Orsmond *et al.,* 2013). It is possible, through the use of assessment which is related closely to key learning outcomes, to highlight errors, provide advice and guidance, and to encourage self-reflexivity. All of this may be achieved through the use of effective and timely feedback which relates to marking criteria and provides means of feeding-forward (Price *et al,* 2010). The outputs of assessment can therefore be used to reinforce learning, improve skills, and to revise conceptual frameworks as part of an on-going learning journey. However, assessment need not only be a means of testing what has been taught, but can also drive, and be an integral part of the learning activity. Using formative assessment to drive learning is effective (Price *et al.,* 2013) but summative assessment can have an equally-important role to play as part of the active learning process, if used effectively. A key facilitator of assessment and feedback can be the use of technology in the learning and assessment process. Technology can be used to enhance the assessment experience and to make it more robust (Hogarth, 2009), more flexible, or used to provide instant feedback. If used in an imaginative way, the structure of an assessment, and the appropriate use of technology to enhance the process, can make assessment a powerful facilitator of learning.

However, although assessment can be a driving force for learning, one key limitation for many forms of assessment is the degree to which they are focused on the individual. Assessments are usually designed to improve an individual's skills or understanding, and then to feed back to that individual the level of their achievement of these competencies. It is usual for the assessment process to end at that point, with the only further use of it being the opportunity to feed forward into other, subsequent assessments undertaken by that individual. The scope for peers benefitting from the assessment output of an individual is often limited, especially outside of group-based projects. So the impact of an assessment is often very narrow in its pedagogic benefits. A key focus for this chapter is to outline a methodology by which the outputs of an assessment can be of direct use to all of the peers within the cohort, and yet also test understanding, skills, and to drive developing digital literacies together.

The assessment being described in this chapter is designed to ensure that the outputs of the assessment provide an active support for learning across all of the student cohort in the class. The assignment requires students to research a subject and then design a learning resource about that subject, which will be useful to the student group and their peers on the same module. In this way, the assessment provides a direct positive impact on peers as well as on individual authors of the assessment. Through the use of technology, the assessment outputs can be shared with the cohort group and kept for posterity so that they will be useful to future cohorts as well. The impact of the assessment on students and its general validity is evaluated elsewhere (Rutherford, Prytherch and BéruBé, *in preparation*), and so the aim of this chapter is to focus instead on evaluating the way in which students approach the assessment and the decision-making processes that are revealed by their behaviour when designing and presenting their learning resources. The analysis highlights that the students challenge themselves by utilising unfamiliar media with which to design their resources, and show a high degree of innovation and skill in the design of the resources as a whole. The students also display a great deal of understanding about the potential of their resources, and the extent to which they will be of use to diverse learners. The transferability of the assessment to other subject areas is also addressed, and it is shown that this assessment approach can easily be adapted to non-HE and non-science settings.

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