Chapter 8.13
An Exploratory Study of Student Self–Assessment in an Online Learning Context

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the investigation of the application of self-assessment in an online learning setting based on action research. The research participants were students who completed their self-assessment when taking the course on Classroom Management taught by the teacher researcher. Although the analytic results show the lack of critical reflection in student self-assessment, the teacher researcher learned the following lessons: a) self-assessment helps the students to articulate their learning results in specific; (b) self-assessment can be a means to cultivate students' abilities in information-integration; (c) using multiple evaluative tools for assessing self-assessment is recommended to better describe the levels of student reflection; and (d) effective and efficient implementation of self-assessment requires a redesigning of the learning management system. Finally, further research can focus on the possibility of promoting the level of student reflection by encouraging students to use evaluative tools to assess their self-assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Technological advances have created an opportunity to design innovative and powerful environments to support a wide variety of learning based on constructivist learning theories. The teacher researcher [TR] consistently received positive

feedback through either student course-feedback or student self-reflection at the end of each course when she integrated online technology into courses for pre-service teachers. Although many students commented, "*I learned a lot from reading peer postings,*" few gave specific in-depth descriptions about what they really learned. What the students really learned from peer postings was a myth to

the TR. Besides, if the students really valued the variety of peer perspective, why did they seldom interact with each other? Few of them further interacted with those who responded to their original posting. Noticeably, those who launched a discussion thread seldom made a second post even though there was a string of responses. The best description of their online behavior was "Post a message and then leave it alone." In their study, Ducate and Lomicka (2008) also found that students did not spontaneously give comments to their classmates and read their classmates' comments. Thus, Ducate and Lomicka suggested to examine how commenting functions, how students can be encouraged to comment and read comment, and whether commenting is an important component in an online learning context.

Furthermore, constructivists consider assessment a part of the learning process rather than a separate component. The evolutionary shifts in assessment approaches are related to the changing views of the nature of learning process (Fourie & van Niekerk, 2001). Critical self-reflection has become the focus of assessment because it makes students more aware of the role of reflection in learning and the questioning of self as to why and what they are learning (Angelo, 1995; Dochy et al., 1999; Fischer & King, 1995; Fourie & van Niekerk, 2001; Fund, Court, & Kramarski, 2002; Huba & Freed, 2000; Latham, 1997; Truck, 1997). However, how self-assessment may contribute to student learning has not been clearly spelled out. In the study of Miceli and Murray (2005), students perceived the strategy training to be beneficial in increasing their range of techniques to deal with language learning, raising their willingness to assume their learning responsibility as a learning agent, and providing opportunities to reflect on themselves as learners. Hence, this paper is based on action research carried out to investigate how student reflect on what they learned from online postings through the approach of self-assessment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Characteristics of Online Learning Community and the Challenges

Constructivists view learning as a process of knowledge construction through active student participation focusing on knowledge application as well as knowledge acquisition. The paradigm of learning shifts from teacher teaching to student learning (Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy, & Perry, 1992; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Huba & Freed, 2000; Kochtanek & Hein, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wilson & Myers, 1999). Hence, the ideal of technology-enabled learning is to create a learning environment which can empower students to work for knowledge growth and application, not for a grade. According to Kochtanek and Hein (2000), the term "learning community" was coined by Meiklejohn in 1920 referring to an environment that facilitates the development of personal viewpoints and create connections between knowledge and contexts for knowledge application. Kochtanek and Hein further defined a learning community [LC] as a community formed by a group of people who share their learning experience, in which (a) learning is distributed among members through their exchanges of information, knowledge and insight, and (b) learning is an unstructured journey of inquiry and discovery based on individual learning needs without any prescribed themes or sequences. Shrivastava (1999) refers LC as a group of people actively participating in collective inquiry for promoting personal knowledge that can be applied to the real world. Mutual learning is the crucial characteristic of LC because people within the community are co-learners. They share with each other their knowledge, exploration, and forms of knowledge application. What they are pursuing are cognitive and practical interests, and solutions to their problems. Based on Hanna, Glowacki-Dudka, and Conceição-Runlee's definition (2000), LC is a culture of learning formed by

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