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IMPROVING ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH STUDENT INVOLVEMENT**RUCHI BAJAJ****ASST. PROFESSOR****GURU RAM DASS COLLEGE OF EDUCATION****SHAHDARA****ABSTRACT**

Assessment in higher education is commonly held to contribute to feedback to students on their learning and the certification of their achievement. This paper argues that this short term focus must be balanced against a longer term emphasis for learning-oriented assessment to foster future learning after graduation. The paper proposes that students need to become assessors within the context of participation in practice, that is, the kinds of highly contextualized learning faced in life and work. To develop the skills and competencies required in professional organisations, students have to reflect on their own behaviour. Many current assessment practices in higher education do not answer this need. The recent interest in new assessment forms, such as self-, peer-, and co-assessment, can be seen as a means to tackle this problem. The present paper argues for student involvement in assessment in higher education and proposes that self-, peer- and co-assessment can be effective tools in developing competencies needed as a professional as implementation of these forms of assessments accelerates the developments of a curriculum based on competencies (knowledge as a tool) rather than knowledge (as a goal) and leads towards the integration of instruction and assessment in higher education. As such, this development of a learning environment contributes to the education of responsible and reflective professionals.

KEYWORDS

higher education, student involvement.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognised that the main goal of professional higher education is to help students to develop into 'reflective practitioners' who are able to reflect critically upon their own professional practice. Students in modern organizations should be able to analyse information, to improve their problem-solving skills and communication, and to reflect on their own role in the learning process. The need for lifelong learning in modern society will increase as it becomes more recognised that the acquisition of knowledge and skills cannot be restricted to the phase of initial education; rather, it has to be a process continuing throughout one's entire working life. Traditional testing methods do not fit such goals as lifelong learning, reflective thinking, being critical, evaluating oneself and problem solving.

Alternatives in assessment have received much attention in the last decade and several forms of more authentic assessment have been introduced in higher education. The skills of self-, peer and co-assessment are important in the development of autonomous, responsible and reflective individuals. Assessment procedures not only should serve as a tool for crediting students with recognised certificates, but also should be used to monitor progress and, if needed, to direct students to remedial learning activities. Research showed that the nature of assessment tasks influences the approaches to learning which students adopt. The existing assessment approaches can have effects contrary to those desired. Eisner (in Boud, 1995) identified the features of the new assessment in education:

- Assessment tasks need to reflect the tasks that students will encounter in the world outside schools, not merely those limited to the schools themselves.
- Assessment tasks should not be restricted to the solutions that students formulate, but also reveal how students go about solving a problem.
- Assessment tasks should reflect the values of the intellectual community from which tasks are derived.
- Assessment tasks need not be limited to a solo performance.
- Assessment tasks should have more than one acceptable solution to a problem and more than one acceptable answer to a question.
- Assessment tasks should have curricular relevance, but not be limited to the curriculum as taught.
- Assessment tasks should permit the student to select a form of representation that he or she chooses to display what has been learned.

The view that the assessment of students' achievements is something which happens at the end of a process of learning is no longer widespread. Assessment is now represented as a tool for learning. The present article focuses on one new dimension of assessment innovation, namely, the changing place and function of the assessor. Alternative assessment also questions if the assessor must be the teacher, and whether self and peers can be introduced as assessors in different settings. This paper focuses on forms of self-, peer-, and co-assessment from the points of view of their applicability in higher education, their effects, challenges involved and suggestive measures to address these challenges.

SELF ASSESSMENT

Self-assessment refers to the involvement of learners in making judgements about their own learning, particularly about their achievements and the outcomes of their learning. Self-assessment is not a new technique, but a way of increasing the role of students as active participants in their own learning and is mostly used for formative assessment in order to foster reflection on one's own learning processes and results.

SELF ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE

- 1) Listing of abilities with definitions and directions to indicate those areas that you feel are your best or strongest.
- 2) Applying a Likert Scale to a group of designated abilities. (For example, "in comparison to others of the same age, my art ability is excellent, above average, average, below average, or poor".)
- 3) Another approach is, for each ability, providing different examples of the ability's applications so that individuals rate their performance level from high to low, and subsequently these are summed to obtain a total score.
- 4) Designing a variety of activities that foster self-assessment. For example, writing letters to the teachers, keeping a daily learning log, preparing a portfolio etc.

PEER ASSESSMENT

Falchikov (1995) defines peer assessment as the process whereby groups of individuals rate their peers. This exercise might entail previous discussion or agreement over criteria. It could involve the use of rating instruments or checklists, which have been designed by others, before the peer assessment exercise, or be designed by the user group to meet their particular needs.

Peer assessment is not only a grading procedure, but also part of a learning process in which skills are developed. Peer assessment can be seen as a part of the self-assessment process and serves to inform self-assessment. The contribution of other students can be a very useful input into the self-assessment process. Students have an opportunity to observe their peers throughout the learning process and often have more detailed knowledge of the work of others than do their teachers.

PEER ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE

- 1) By giving feedback of a qualitative nature.
- 2) By giving marking or grading.
- 3) Peer ranking involves each group member ranking all of the others from best to worst on one or more factors.

- 4) Peer rating involves each group member rating each other group member on a given set of performance or personal characteristics, using any one of several kinds of rating scales.
- 5) Peer nomination involves each group member being the highest in the group on a particular characteristic or dimension of performance.

CO-ASSESSMENT

Co-assessment, the participation of the students with the staff in the assessment process, is a way of providing an opportunity for students to assess themselves while allowing the staff to maintain the necessary control over the final assessments (Hall, 1995). Synonyms for co-assessment are 'collaborative assessment' and 'cooperative assessment'.

Co-assessment can be used for summative purposes, while self- and peer-assessment are used in a formative way. Somervell (1993) sees collaborative assessment as a teaching and learning process in which the student and instructor meet to clarify objectives and standards. In this case, the student is not necessarily responsible for the assessment, but the student collaborates in the process of determining what will be assessed and perhaps by whom. Pain, Bull and Brna (1996) argue that the term 'collaborative assessment' can be applied to an assessor and an assessee working together to form a mutual understanding of the student's knowledge. It is a true collaboration in so far as both parties work on the shared goal of providing a mutually agreed assessment of the student's knowledge. This entails both parties negotiating details of the assessment and discussing any misunderstandings that exist. This is consistent with the less confrontational approach to assessment that we seek to adopt while stressing the need to develop an ongoing relationship between the assessor and assessee.

CO-ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE

- 1) Co-Assessment is generally used in combination with self- and peer- assessment.
- 2) Teachers and students can together set the criteria in terms of their relative importance and prepare a marking schedule.
- 3) Students can be asked to rate themselves on teacher specified criteria.

EFFECTS

- 1) Students become more aware of the quality of their own work. They can predict their own mark and, while they are doing this, they reflect on their behavior (reflective practitioner).
- 2) It helps students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, to document their progress, identify effective learning strategies and materials, become aware of the learning contexts that work best for them and establish goals for future independent thinking.
- 3) It encourages students to feel responsible for their own learning.
- 4) It fosters skills and abilities like problem solving, self assessment abilities etc.
- 5) It encourages involvement, establishes a reference, promotes excellence, provides increased feedback, fosters attendance, builds confidence and teaches responsibility.
- 6) It makes assessment more objective and fair.
- 7) It signals to students that their experiences are valued and their judgements are respected.
- 8) It reduces the teacher's workload.
- 9) It helps students to become motivated and improve their own learning as it focuses students' attention on the meta-cognitive aspects of their learning and teaches them to be more effective at monitoring their own progress.
- 10) It assists student-teachers in making role changes from being students to being teachers; to provide insights into the assessment process which may be of use to them in assessing their own students; and to provide a skill development step towards self-assessment.
- 11) It makes students think more deeply, see how others tackle problems, pick up points and learn to criticize constructively.

CHALLENGES INVOLVED

- 1) Many teachers are apprehensive in handing over the assessment to the students.
- 2) It is a time consuming process.
- 3) Most difficult aspect is to determine the criteria in consensus with students.
- 4) Negative attitudes within learners toward assessment.
- 5) Dominance of summative assessment and a lack of emphasis on formative assessment.
- 6) Major challenge is of perception. The idea that teachers do the teaching and marking is hard to change.
- 7) Students are prone to produce improper ratings in self assessment if there is no extensive training in it.
- 8) Peer assessment can involve: friendship marking(resulting in over marking); collusive marking(resulting in a lack of differentiation within groups); decibel marking(where individuals dominate groups and the highest marks); and parasite marking(where students fail to contribute but benefit from group members) if there is no extensive training in it.
- 9) Dominance of external evaluation, assessment of product and norm-referenced testing.

SUGGESTIVE MEASURES

- 1) It is important to give the students an active role in the development of assessment criteria and therefore students should be given systematic and comprehensive training in how to establish criteria in the assessment process.
- 2) Students should be given extensive training in self assessment and peer assessment skills.
- 3) Problems involved in peer assessment can be prevented by combining peer assessment with self assessment or co-assessment. Self and peer assessment are combined when students are assessing peers but the self is also included as a member of the group and must be assessed. This combination fosters reflection on one's own learning process and one's learning activities compared to the other members in the group or class.
- 4) Problem of evaluation of group work can also be resolved by combining peer assessment with self assessment.
- 5) Final grade to be the average of the marks the student receive from self assessment, peer assessment and from the lecturers.
- 6) Most important is to publicise a new discourse that positions assessment not as an act of subjugation to others, but as one of asserting control over one's own learning. Most important in this is the need for a view that considers teaching, learning and assessment as a whole and rejects treating assessment as separate from the processes of learning.
- 7) Emphasis on criterion-referenced testing, internal evaluation, assessment of process and a shift in emphasis from purely summative to formative and summative assessment.

CONCLUSION

Self-, peer- and co-assessments can be very effective when used in combination. Self- and peer-assessment can be used for summative purposes as part of the co-assessment by giving the teacher the power to make the final decision about a process or a product. In this way, the traditional assessment, in which the teacher makes an autonomous decision, is not comparable with co-assessment. The combination of self-, peer- and co assessment makes teachers and students work together in a constructive way and, as a result, they come to higher levels of understanding by negotiation. When students become teachers, this role-changing provides them with insights into the assessment process. It can be concluded that the use of self-, peer- and collaborative assessment is important to remove the student/teacher barrier, to develop enterprising competencies in students, and leads to greater motivation and 'deeper' learning. This is the main reason why these forms of assessment need to be integrated into curricula in higher education. Involvement in learning, including assessment, is vital to effective learning.

Curricula nowadays are becoming more competency-based. This redesign of the curriculum requires a redesign of the assessment in order to create a learning environment that fosters learning. Self-, peer- and co-assessment can discourage passive, reproductive forms of learning. By integrating these forms of assessment into the curriculum, students are likely to develop into competent persons and lifelong learners who reflect continuously on their behaviour and learning process. These alternative forms of assessment should be a part of a process of change towards a student centred learning environment. This change requires a shift in emphasis from the norm-referenced to the criterion-referenced testing, from purely summative to formative and summative assessment, from external to internal evaluation, and from the assessment of product to the assessment of process as well. In order to be successful, the following supporting factors seem to be necessary: pedagogical change; a shared value system between students and teachers; and an organisation-wide evaluation ethic.

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