

Assessment reform, innovative technology, improving assessment and feedback Are they at odds with each other?

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Background to this paper

- Recent participants in a seminar to review and input into a draft literature review of "e-Assessment"
- The review (Oldfield et al, 2012) considers where the cutting edge in e-assessment in terms of academic literature – across all sectors of education
- Striking number of different positions/roles at seminar
 - assessment reformers
 - technology developers
 - e-learning optimists and supporters
 - technology sceptics
 - learning and teaching researchers and practitioners
 - socio-technical commentators
 - efficiency and cost benefit analysts

Rowntree's 17 principles

- Rowntree's (1977) list of 17 principles of good assessment
- Yet it appears that little has changed in the intervening 35 years except where this has been imposed by legislation.
- The recent review of literature on e-assessment found that the use of digital technologies has yet to be 'transformative', particularly in high stakes assessment (Oldfield et al, 2012)

Rowntree's 17

1. Articulate the assessment criteria; including trying to express our implicit constructs.
2. Use more varied assessment methods. Make them educationally relevant.
3. Give credit for what learners learned, as well as if they learned what we intended.
4. Assess "naturalistically" i.e. use assessment processes and products that are themselves educationally valuable.
5. Give learners maximum feedback (not just a grade or rank, but summative of their traits/qualities).
6. When criteria are judgmental, say (to learners) whether their performance is being compared to norms, criteria, our expectations, or their own previous performance.
7. Colleagues may have quite different perceptions.
 - Accept this, don't converge unnaturally; report divergence.
 - Give back exam scripts.
8. Resist drifting to criteria that attract consensus marks: stay with the educationally relevant ones.
9. Support portfolios: products and assessments from many peers and self, ...

Rowntree's 17 (part 2)

- Report results only to learners (i.e. not made public). [Data protection act.]
 - a) Focus on eventual, not average or early, state
 - b) Emphasise learners' strengths, but mention weaknesses.
- Don't conflate i.e. no portmanteau grades.
 - Prepare a multi-dimensional profile: with considerable narrative content
- No pass/fail except for professional competence certification. (The reader of the report should make the judgement of how good is good enough.)
- No comments in confidential references that you wouldn't have learners read. [Freedom of Information]
- Be explicit in references that the assessment is about specific things; that it is not about permanent qualities; require that you are given some understanding of how the reader will use the report; get the relevant qualities from the requester.
- If we predict learners' future qualities, follow up and see how right we were(nt).
- Give health warnings on certificates (transcripts) i.e. about the limits on how much weight to give accreditations as a measure of the person.

Pass
Fail



So why are improvements in assessment so difficult to achieve?

Assessment for accountability

- One major reason HE does assessment is to provide students with certificates for future employers.
- This has nothing whatsoever inherently to do with helping learning.
- Pretending otherwise, failing to acknowledge the elephant in the room, is not helpful.
- But this doesn't mean it should not be challenged
- why is this not challenged more?

Different perspectives on e-assessment

- Assessment reformers
 - Assessment, particularly high stakes assessment – not fit for purpose in 21st century (Broadfoot, 2007; Pellegrino and Quellmalz, 2010)
 - Not kept pace with other changes in Education and society (e.g. ecological and community validity, social justice, and benefits for learners and learning)
 - Not meeting the broader needs of individuals and society
 - See digital technologies as way of reconfiguring assessment practices
 - Looking for new ways of assessing, not replications of existing practice
- Learning and teaching researchers and practitioners
 - Assumption that feedback is the main priority and always helps learning
 - Also - improving learning outcomes by supporting better feedback or new forms of assessment strategy or practice
 - Technology is subordinated to the learning design employed
 - Broader assessment reform is not usually part of the group's agenda

Different perspectives on e-assessment

- e-Learning optimists and supporters
 - See existing pedagogy as in deficit - as 'something that must change'
 - Yet current assessment regimes are not challenged
 - Herring (2004) - 'passing parade of technologies', focussed on the next 'best thing', driven by novelty, imagining how it will be used and useful.
 - These issues may sometimes hinder rather than encourage educational innovation.
- Technology developers
 - Excited by new ways of 'meeting needs', should capitalise on new opportunities
 - Technology is the starting point
 - See technology as neutral and/or the agent of change
 - Focus is on 'effects of', rather than 'effects with' (Perkins, 1993)

Different perspectives on e-assessment

- Technology sceptics/Socio-technical commentators
 - Express deep concerns about the role of technology in surveillance, monitoring and how e-assessment contributes to this
 - Increasing concerns about the widespread proliferation of data, its use and misuse for making judgments on us (Goldstein, 2012)
 - Sceptical about the potential of technology to transform assessment or any other educational phenomena
 - Situate assessment in a broader social, cultural and political landscape
- Efficiency and cost benefit analysts
 - Focus on the institutional or wider opportunities to scale up or replicate existing assessments
 - Costs and releasing staff time are the main drivers
 - Learning from assessments and the opportunities for new forms of assessments are not considered

Discussion

General: Do you agree with the picture we've outlined?

Specific: What conflicts of this kind have you come across?

(What's stopping an e-assessment transformation?)

Learners as stakeholders in e-assessment

- Benson Snyder showed how different students on the same course
 - a) want different things;
 - b) select and use the available assessment measures on the course differently depending on their goal
 - E.g. getting the top score in front of their classmates vs. selecting which bits to learn on the basis of utility later when they return as postgrads.
- Comfort
- Revising the current product (doing corrections)
- Self-regulating effort

- To what extent do these competing interests develop/hinder adoption of e-assessment?
- Operating at different levels (national/international/institutional/discipline/own research/classes) **with different purposes**
- Different interpretations of the key issues to be addressed
- Not so much hindering as developing arguments in isolation or in silos
- Less evangelism needed?
- Technology is not an IT
- What is driving the initiative and who benefits?

Conclusions

- Rather than assuming common ground and common aims on e-assessment.....
- ...we suggest there are strong contrasts amongst multiple fields with competing discourses, values, goals, literatures and perspectives
- **E-assessment initiators/technology enthusiasts** need to understand and interrogate the broader assessment landscape
- **L&T researchers and practitioners** need to pay more attention to assessment reform and move beyond the formative/summative dichotomy
- **Assessment reformers and social commentators** need a better understanding of technological affordances and new potentials
- Reminded of NHS multi agency working – more dialogue and listening to and recognising the concerns/perspectives of other groups
- Need to aim for a more common understanding of the purpose of e-assessment in particular contexts.

A place to stop

- Questions?
- If there were no need for accreditation, what assessment, if any, would you and your students have on your course?

For the slides, handout etc. see:

<http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/talks/eass.html>