Chapter IV

Learning and Assessment: A Case Study – Going the Full Monty

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Abstract

This chapter reflects on the lessons learned by the developers of a course about self, peer, and group assessment for adult educators, large elements of which were carried out via online discussion forums. In particular, this chapter will look in detail at the ways in which the learners used online discussion forums and also examine particular exchanges to show how the group projects were developed in an online environment. From these reflections come a number of pointers that may enable facilitators to either make changes to the way in which their courses are organised or highlight aspects to their students to enrich and simplify their learning experience. This case study represents the first iteration of an action research cycle where future investigations will lead to increasingly effective integration of e-learning in the form of online discussions and the development of more straightforward self, peer and group assessment.
Introduction

When my colleagues and I began to design a new course within our programme for adult educators, we started with a fundamental belief: that to truly achieve independent learning a wholehearted experiential approach must be taken. Therefore, responsibility had to lie in the hands of the student and this had to apply to both the content of the course and the assessment of the learning process. This turned out to be less straightforward then we had imagined.

This chapter is intended to reflect on the lessons learned by the course developers about self, peer, and group assessment for adult educators, large elements of which were carried out via online discussion forums.

In particular, this chapter will look in detail at the ways in which the learners used online discussion forums and will also examine particular exchanges to show how the group projects were developed in an online environment. Out of these reflections have come a number of pointers that will either allow us to make changes to the way in which the course is organised or enable us to highlight aspects of it to the participants, to possibly enrich and/or simplify the learning experience. We hope that our sometimes-cautionary tale may also help other teachers and developers who are intending to apply peer and self assessment techniques.

Background

The course we designed, Learning and Assessment, was delivered in a blended mode, partly through face-to-face sessions, and partly at a distance using whatever mechanisms the students felt they needed, whether that was e-mail, phone, or online discussions through the Blackboard learning-management system. In the case of the latter, all of the participants had some prior experience of online discussions in previous courses in which the teacher had contributed to the discussion as an e-moderator and where their postings had been summatively assessed. In these earlier situations, the discussion element had therefore been a compulsory part of the course requirements.

The course at the centre of this case study, Learning and Assessment comprised two main threads: First, it focussed on independent learning theories and stratagems; and, second, it was designed around collaboratively assessed group projects.