Chapter 17
Activating Assessment for Learning: Are We on the Way with Web 2.0?

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ABSTRACT
This chapter examines the role Web 2.0 tools can play in promoting the “assessment for learning” agenda. It presents a number of cases of peer, self, and computer assessments that display a range of characteristics proposed by Elliott (2008) for the next generation of assessment tasks. The discussion of the cases reveals a missing characteristic, which is a form of feedback to the students that will take their learning forward—the author calls this “advice for action.” It is argued that in order for assessment tasks and tools to become more effective they need to be embedded within a pedagogical framework, which in turn requires a supportive infrastructure as proposed by the 4Ts pyramid. The major components of the pyramid consist of: (1) tool development; (2) staff training; (3) rethinking the assessment tasks; and (4) learning from the assessment tasks.

INTRODUCTION
The current picture of assessment in tertiary education is that there are pockets of change with the advent of e-assessment systems and Web 2.0 tools, and emergence of techniques such as e-portfolios, but the real benefits that have been accrued from the bright shining box of Web 2.0 tools have been in the sphere of learning and teaching. This is because Web 2.0 tools offer new forms of connectivity between barriers as described by Frydenberg in Chapter 7, which facilitate more types of teaching and learning dialogues to take place. This connectivity, with its potential for collaboration, opens the door to what Eijkman, in Chapter 18, describes as a “socially focused and performance-oriented epistemic framework.” This means that the focus has more explicitly adopted
the recommendations found in the social constructivist and situated learning research literature. In other words, Web 2.0 tools facilitate collaboration and offer the potential to move away from the assessment of individual skills to implement a social constructivist view of learning.

However, assessment has remained largely transmission orientated in both conception and in practice (Knight & Yorke, 2003). This is especially true in tertiary education, where the teacher’s role is usually to judge student work and to deliver feedback as comments or marks (Shepard, 2000, 2001) rather than to involve students as active participants in the process. The opening section of this chapter addresses the theoretical influences on assessment including the earlier legacy from both cognitive science and constructivist theorists such as Piaget and Bruner, and shows how early web-based assessments were in this vein. The full value of Web 2.0 tools for assessment is still being investigated, and there are few papers published in this area at present, but in parallel with the emergence of the new tools there has been a rethink of assessment and its role in tertiary education. The “assessment for learning” agenda, together with a set of recommendations for “Assessment 2.0” (Elliott, 2008) form the basis for a discussion of a number of technologically supported assessment activities and strategies, however we still have some way to go in order to align Web 2.0 tools with Assessment 2.0. This chapter therefore argues for a new focus of e-assessment that builds upon the Web 2.0 developments but is pedagogically rather than technologically driven. It advocates moving towards an assessment for learning agenda which provides students with advice for action that will assist them on their paths of lifelong learning.

THEORETICAL DRIVERS FOR INFLUENCES ON ASSESSMENT

It is difficult to differentiate or separate assessment from learning, and when we start to investigate the theoretical influences on assessment it is not unreasonable to expect them to be more strongly tied to learning theories than is often found to be the case. This is because developments in assessment have been largely driven by measurement techniques that can account for the validity and reliability of large-scale testing programs, rather than provide students with feedback that will assist them with future learning scenarios. The latter notion is referred to in this chapter as “advice for action.” On the other hand, the way in which knowledge creation has been defined and understood has had far-reaching consequences for the way in which education has been delivered (Case, 1996). Consequently, it has affected pedagogical strategies, but often theoretical positions have not been thoroughly worked out at the level of student assessment.

When we examine a constructivist approach to learning we find that knowledge acquisition is asserted as an active, individual process. From the perspective of Piaget (1930) knowledge is developed through the individual continually interacting with and manipulating his or her immediate surroundings. This type of interaction facilitates the construction of a number of mental representations. Induction and the development of a formal rule system can be equated with learning and assessment, and the emphasis of assessment, then, is on testing the acquisition of these types of representations. This paradigm has dominated assessment practices over the years. It is this type of assessment that James (2008) describes as “assessing learning of what is taught” (p. 21). These early ideas do not sit well with the more recent views and ideas about assessment, which have been characterized by Elliott (2008) as “Assessment 2.0,” and are discussed later in this chapter.

Further developments within the constructivist paradigm that are of particular interest to the assessment narrative are seen in the work of Bruner (1982), who suggested that performance in assessment tasks will match competence levels depending on the type of help that is available to