Chapter XV
Evaluation and Effective Learning:
Strategic Use of E-Portfolio as an Alternative Assessment at University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses evaluation as a strategic instrument to promote active and significant learning and how, in that strategy, the use of alternative assessment and technology-aided learning-and-teaching processes could be of great help. There is an important margin to allow the teachers to design the assessment in a strategic manner and modify the nature of the students’ learning activities. So, the central question is analysing whether the use of an electronic portfolio as an assessment tool in the subject “International Economic Relations,” has been used strategically. In other words, is the type of desired learning really being achieved? Is significant and deep learning being stimulated? If not, what kind of learning is being stimulated? How should the assessment be modified to achieve the desired results? To help answer all these questions, we have analysed whether the activities and products which make up the “International Economic Relations” portfolio fulfil the conditions that characterise a strategic evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The present chapter analyses evaluation as a strategic instrument to promote active and significant learning and how, in that strategy, the use of alternative assessment and technology-aided learning-and-teaching processes could be of great help. Therefore, the principal aim of the chapter is to discuss the difficulties that assessment processes have and how the use of digital learning
platforms to complement teaching could help to use evaluation as a strategic decision to achieve better learning.

The method used to raise the question is to expose an educational innovation that has been developed for several years in the University of Oviedo. The subject I teach in the faculty of Economics “International Economic Relations” (REI) is the context I have used to develop an electronic portfolio as an assessment tool which helps me to evaluate the students and to implicate them in more active learning. This is an optional subject in business administration with 150-175 students in three groups, morning and evening. The technological aspect of the portfolio is supported by the electronic learning platform in University of Oviedo, Aulanet, nowadays ruled in Moodle.

The theoretical framework in which this chapter is inspired has two complementary dimensions. On the one hand, we have to consider the crucial aspect of evaluation at university and the role teachers have to develop as assessment agents. To evaluate the learning achieved by students is a big challenge for teachers and for institutions, especially in a context where the learning of competences and abilities are of much higher importance. As a result, evaluation has to be revisited, being used as a strategic tool to promote effective learning and an alternative to assessment options.

On the other hand, the chapter is concerned with the use of technology in education, exploring the possibilities that virtual educational platforms and ITC’s have in helping the use of alternative assessment procedures to enhance active learning. The context is the technology-aided learning-and-teaching processes. I don’t employ the more extended expression of “technology based learning” because I agree with the idea that technology can help learning but it cannot replace the personal and social dimensions of learning.

Bearing in mind all these questions, the rest of the chapter is devoted first to explore what type of learning we want in the modern university and how to use the evaluation as a strategic element of the teaching process. Second, to explore the possibilities of using the portfolio as an alternative assessment tool, I describe my own experience with an electronic version of this evaluation methodology. Finally, I critically review the REI evaluation innovation and compare it with what is considered by experts as a strategic assessment tool to enhance effective learning. Hence, the experience is described in detail trying to find out if the conditions of a tactical evaluation are present in it.

**ASSESSMENT AS A STRATEGY, SIGNIFICANT LEARNING AS A GOAL**

One of the basic objectives of the present-day university is to achieve effective teaching: teaching by transforming the lecture room into a learning space, thus endowing the classes with an additional value that justifies the students’ presence in them. This approach means that students must be active subjects of their own learning, they must experience for themselves the changes in the way of thinking, feeling, and acting that the learning process produces in them.

To achieve this, it must be the learners who, with the teacher’s help, build their own learning. This requires the students to become involved in the process, to be willing to take part in the learning opportunities suggested in the lecture room, and to continue the process until they reach a high level of independence in it. It is essential, therefore, that the students should be highly motivated. Some students are capable of motivating themselves, but the majority need external stimuli to arouse interest within them in the task to be carried out and the knowledge to be acquired. One of the aspects that has the greatest influence on the students and their involvement in the learning process is the way they expect
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