How do students engage with assessment?

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11th June 2011

Self-assessment: strategies and software to stimulate learning
My plan

• Assessment at the Open University

• Lessons from analyses of student engagement with e-assessment

• Who is in control? (leading to discussion of Peerwise)
The UK Open University

- Founded in 1969;
- Supported distance learning;
- 260,000 students, mostly studying part-time;
- Undergraduate modules are completely open entry, so students have a wide range of previous qualifications;
- Normal age range from 18 to ??
- 12,000 of our students have declared a disability of some sort;
- 20,000 of our students live outside the UK.
Assessment at the Open University

• Throughout our history we have used summative, formative and self-assessment, with some blurring of the distinctions between them.

A typical module has:
• In-text questions (ITQs)
• Self-assessment questions (SAQs)
• Online quizzes
• Tutor-marked assignments (TMAs)
• Interactive computer-marked assignments (iCMAs)
• Exam or End of module assessment
Assessment at the OU

- In-text questions (ITQs)
- Self-assessment questions (SAQs)
- Online quizzes (iCMAs)

Self assessment

- Tutor-marked assignments (TMAs)
- Interactive computer-marked assignments (iCMAs)

Summative and formative

- Exam or End of module assessment
Interactive computer-marked assignments (iCMAs)

• Used as part of the continuous assessment for many modules, alongside tutor-marked assignments;
• These iCMAs are summative but lightly weighted;
• Their primary purpose is formative; students have three attempts at each question with increasing and tailored feedback;
• Other modules use iCMAs in a purely formative way, with students being able to repeat questions and try different variants of them for extra practice.

So iCMAs are used summatively, formatively, for self-assessment (and also for diagnostic purposes)
Student engagement with iCMAs

• We have vast amounts of data relating to student engagement with iCMAs in different modes of use;

• These data have been analysed. Although the conclusions only relate to student engagement with iCMAs and to Open University Science Faculty students, there are some more general indications;

• I only have time to present you with a very small selection of our findings;

• For more information see my poster and publications.
How many students attempt each question? (summative)
How many students attempt each question? (formative)
Use of feedback...formative-only use
When do students do the questions? (hard cut-off date)
When do students do the questions? (no cut-off date)
When do students do questions? (formative with no cut-off date)
When do students do questions?
(individual student behaviour)
What leads to the right-hand behaviour on the previous slide?

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Some conclusions

- Students appear to engage with summative iCMA questions at a deeper level than when they are in formative-only use;
- However summative use can lead to preoccupation with the minutiae of grading – does this get in the way of learning?
- Does the answer lie in thresholding?
- Exams are a stronger motivator – students decide for themselves to use iCMAs in revision;
- **Student use is highly dependent on what they believe their lecturers’ intentions are.**
For further information:


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Who is in control?

- My research findings indicate that scaffolding (e.g. hard cut-off dates) is important in encouraging our distance learning adult students to engage with assessment;

- But would it be better if students were more in control?
‘Students use PeerWise to create and to explain their understanding of course related assessment questions, and to answer and discuss questions created by their peers.’

Created by Paul Denny at the University of Auckland.

http://peerwise.cs.auckland.ac.nz/

Forms the basis of the JISC ‘Student-Generated Content for Learning (SGC4L)’ Project at the University of Edinburgh (See Poster)

Project Blog: http://sgc4l.blogspot.co.uk/