Supporting self-evaluation: helping learners take control of the assessment process

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Outline

Focus: exercising autonomy in the assessment process rather than assessment of autonomy

Autonomy and assessment – key issues

Distance learning context

Framework for critical reflection and decision-making

Learner and teacher reactions

Autonomy and assessment: key issues

Range of definitions, terminology and interpretations (Hurd, 2005)

Two concepts key to exercise of responsibility and control of learning: critical reflection and decision-making (Holec, 1980; Van Lier, 1996; Little, 2003)

Agreement on importance for educational programmes of developing autonomy (Sinclair, 2000)

Autonomy and assessment: key issues

Efforts to encourage autonomous learning often not backed up through the assessment process

Exhortations to autonomy contradicted by assessment strategies that 'value dependency' (Brockbank and Mcgill, 1998) and undermined by lack of 'constructive alignment' (Biggs, 1999)

Distance learning is no exception

Autonomy and assessment: key issues

Concerns about learners' capacity for and experience of critical reflection (e.g. Candy, 1991; Ushioda, 1996; Benson, 2001)

Learners find it time-consuming; expectations based on previous learning experience

Importance of capacity to self-monitor and self-assess, but how easy is this for language learners?

Teacher reluctance to 'let go' (Little, 1995)

Autonomy and assessment: key issues

Possible to overcome reluctance by linking reflection to assessment?

'Recipe following'? (Boud and Walker, 1993)

Importance of dialogue and interaction in development of reflection and autonomy Benson and Lor (1998)

Difficulty of reflecting alone (Newton, 1996), need for a 'skilled helper' (Brookfield, 1987) and 'pedagogical dialogue' (Little, 1995)

Contextual background

Focus on 'learning to learn' and nature of 'graduateness'

UK Quality Assurance Agency benchmark statement Languages and Related Studies:
a graduate in this discipline will be expected to be an 'effective and self-aware independent learner' (2002: 13, section 6.3)

Generic support developed for other disciplines in OU not appropriate for languages

Framework for critical reflection

Guidance through the stages of Kolb's learning cycle/spiral (1984)

- •Concrete experience (e.g. performance in assessment)
- •Reflective observation on concrete experience
- •Abstract conceptualisation (formulation of priorities and action plans)
- •Further concrete experience

Framework for critical reflection

Skills audit
Self-assessment sheet
Reflection sheet
Tips sheet
- Returning to the experience
- Attending to feelings
- Re-evaluating the experience (Boud et al, 1985)

Skills sheets

Teacher and learner experiences

In-depth interviews with teachers (n=17) and learners (n=31)

Recorded and transcribed

Qualitative analysis

How do teachers feel the process impacts on their workload?

How do learners feel the process impacts on their study and assignments?

Teacher responses

Made work easier rather than harder

More focused, relevant feedback based on learner goals and action rather than assumptions

Increased dialogue with learners

Self-assessment sheets *enormously helpful* leading to *a real dialogue focused on the assignment work*

Noted increased learner reflection

they are really looking at their language development in a more critical way

Learner responses

Identified specific priorities

Some evidence of greater degree of critical reflection and decision-making

More satisfaction with study

Value of investing time in the process

- *of course it takes time, but it saves time overall through sharper focus*
- *I don't think it takes a lot of time, especially if it becomes part of your routine. It was helpful. I felt I was working on things that needed to be worked on and not wasting time, so it was time well spent*

Learner responses

Increased dialogue with teacher

- *It actually made me sit down and think, now what has the tutor said this time? It really brought it home more consciously, even positive things, for example, where I thought it was quite good, she did too, great!*
- *Sometimes I was pleasantly surprised that she disagreed with me….that something I thought I'd done abominably, she thought I'd done quite well*

Continuing concerns

Difficulties with self-assessment: the need for experience and practice

- *I've been used to either selling myself, or criticising, evaluating what I do*
- *It got easier as we went on through the course*

Difficulties with the format

- *I find this very difficult to sort of talk to myself in writing....it's just that there's various sorts of things that don't really work for me*

Continuing concerns

The importance of the affective side of assessment

- *when I got the first comment about my accent, it stopped me talking for quite a while*

- *it's a good idea this pat on the back when you have done something right…you can very easily put yourself down*

Writing things down made sure that you *really look carefully and analyse the comments* **and didn't just** *rush on*

Continuing concerns

Used from 2000-2010 – but by third of learners at most

Self-assessment guidance incorporated into study materials

Framework incorporated in study guides

Reflection tasks included in some assignments

Learners weigh up benefits in personal context

Remaining questions

Could compulsory use of the framework in assessment encourage learners to develop the 'habit' of critical reflection and decision-making?

Or would it simply encourage them to 'play the game'? Does that matter?

Or should we be encouraging informed choice and be ready to accept strategic decisions?

Are there more creative ways to assess evidence of critical reflection and informed decision-making?

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