Abstract

This study sought to determine the critical elements of an authentic learning activity design them into an applicable framework and then use this framework to guide the design, development and application of work-relevant assessment. Its purpose was to formulate an effective model of task design and assessment. The first phase of the study identified from the literature critical elements that determined assessment as being authentic, and presented these to practitioners and experts for feedback. In phase two, it codified the elements into a framework that was then applied to the redesign of assessments in an army course. Phase three involved student evaluation of the redesigned assessment activities. This led to further review and revision of elements in phase four. The study outcomes suggest that it is possible, by identifying and codifying individual elements, to determine the ways in which the authenticity of an individual assessment activity might be enhanced. The paper concludes with a literature update on the framework elements that lead to suggestions for further research.

Keywords: assessment; authentic assessment; authentic learning (p. 205)

Introduction

The paper begins with a discussion of the factors driving assessment change in the current educational context which include:

- the information revolution
- the consequent pace of technological innovation
- the increased demand from both employers and government for a more highly skilled workforce
- the desire to increase and make more accessible the higher education experience to an increasing proportion of the overall population(p. 205).

This study is an attempt to produce an effective model of task design that would support the development of more authentic or "real world" assessment tasks by investigating answers to two research questions:
1. What are the specific characteristics of authentic assessment that facilitate design and assessment of complex and authentic tasks?
2. How do students respond to tasks designed to incorporate the characteristics of authentic assessment? (206)

The study involved a range of activities
1. establishment of the critical characteristics or elements of authentic assessment from the literature
2. development of those elements into a framework,
3. utilisation of expert analysis and feedback to enhance the design of the elements within that framework,
4. testing of the framework by applying it to the redesign of a module, and
5. evaluating the assessment activity from the student perspective and creation of learning principles.(p. 207)

Eight critical elements of authentic assessment from the literature
The literature review identified critical elements of authentic assessment. These are discussed in turn and later captured as a set of questions which were used in subsequent implementation phases of the study. The set below represents the final version that was produced in response to refinements to the original set based on feedback received from practitioners and experts in Phase 2 of the study and later during the implementation phase.

(1) To what extent does the assessment activity challenge the student?
(2) Is a performance, or product, required as a final assessment outcome?
(3) Does the assessment activity require that transfer of learning has occurred, by means of demonstration of skill?
(4) Does the assessment activity require that metacognition is demonstrated?
(5) Does the assessment require a product or performance that could be recognised as authentic by a client or stakeholder? (accuracy)
(6) Is fidelity required in the assessment environment? And the assessment tools (actual or simulated)?
(7) Does the assessment activity require discussion and feedback?
(8) Does the assessment activity require that students collaborate? (p. 211)

The questions were then applied to the redesign of a learning module with particular attention to the wording of learning objectives and the consistency of assessment criteria. A detailed table outlines and justifies the revisions that were made to the module with respect to each of the eight critical questions.

Implementation and evaluation
Evaluation of the revised module was based on four types of sources:
- face-to-face interviews with students on completion of the module
- observation notes taken during module delivery
- video recordings of student activities and
- collated student responses to two evaluation questions.

Student perspectives on their experience of completing the redesigned assessment tasks were largely positive as illustrated and summarised in a tabular format.

Application of evaluation data
The eight key questions were refined in response to the evaluation data that had been collected (see earlier set above).
The resilience of the eight critical design elements

The paper concludes that:

- it is possible to identify and apply critical elements of assessment authenticity
- students responded well to the task that had been redesigned to boost authenticity
- some elements of the framework would benefit from further investigation and consequent refinement with reference to question wording and the possibility of establishing an order of priority for the application
- it would be desirable to develop the framework into a heuristic assessment tool for application by educational designers
- the sector would benefit from a better understanding of the level and type of teacher development required to apply authentic assessment design
- the study has the potential to address the challenge of assessing outcomes considered appropriate for twenty-first century university graduates.

References

The paper has 27 references which would be useful for anyone wishing to undertake further reading in the area of authentic assessment.

This series of briefs on assessment topics has been prepared by the UQ Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI) for UQ teaching academics. “UQ ASSESSMENT BRIEFS” of journal articles, book chapters, reviews, websites, reports etc are distributed to Faculty and School Teaching and Learning Chairs in a form designed to encourage wider distribution.

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