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Conducting assessment online: educational developers' perspectives

Peter Anthony Donnan
University of Wollongong

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Conducting assessment online: Educational developers' perspectives

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

by

Peter Anthony Donnan

MDistEd(Deakin), MLitt(UNE), GradDipREd(Signadou), BA(Sydney), DipEd(Sydney)

Faculty of Education

2007

Certification

Candidate's declaration

I, Peter Donnan, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Peter Donnan

30 May 2007

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Glossary

Acronyms & Abbreviations	Meaning
ACODE	Australasian Council on Open, Distance and E-learning
ATN	Australian Technology Network
AUTC	Australian University Teaching Committee
CAA	Computer Assisted Assessment
Carrick Institute	The Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training (Australian Government)
EDs	Educational developers
Go8	Group of Eight Universities
ICED	The International Consortium for Educational Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IRU	Innovative Research Universities
NGU	New Generation Universities
SCROLLA	Scottish Centre for Research into On-Line Learning and Assessment

Publications related to this thesis

Donnan, P. (2004). e-Learning Assessment: Instructional design pathways. Paper presented at International Conference on Computers in Education (ICCE). In E. McKay (Ed) *Acquiring and constructing knowledge through human-computer interactions: Creating new visions for the future of learning*. RMIT, Melbourne, Nov 30th - Dec 4th, 2004. CD-ROM. Altona, Victoria. Common Ground Publishing, Melbourne.

Donnan, P., Brickell, G. & Brown, C. (2006). Conceptualising assessment for online delivery: Educational developers' perspectives. In S. Frankland (Ed) *Enhancing teaching and learning through assessment: Approaches in practices. Assessment Series*, (pp. 110 – 119). Volume Three, Hong Kong: the Assessment Resource Centre, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Abstract

This study investigated educational developers' perspectives on the conduct of assessment in Australian universities when online components were introduced into courses or subjects. To advance the inquiry, four research questions were developed that focussed on: the characteristics of educational developers that influenced the assessment advice they provided to academics; significant influences upon educational developers' thinking about assessment; critical assessment issues they identified when online components were introduced; and how to represent their thinking about assessment when it was conducted partially or fully online. The method of research was located within a qualitative, interpretive paradigm based on multiple case studies associated with the six participants who were employed in different Australian universities. Data collection involved three interviews with each participant, conducted in three consecutive semesters between June 2004 and July 2005. Data were digitally recorded during each interview, transcribed and then electronically imported into the qualitative software program Nvivo. Techniques of qualitative analysis were used to identify, describe and interpret critical components in participants' thinking about forms of assessment they were encountering online. The main conclusions of the inquiry were that (1) although the characteristics of educational developers in the sample group were described, their relevance became more apparent within the larger university contexts in which they worked; (2) significant influences upon educational developers occurred at an individual, as well as an institutional level and these were represented in a model that encapsulated key components in respondents' perspectives; (3) critical issues identified by respondents revolved around the difficulties of establishing the identity of online students, how to assess online discussions appropriately, use of the term 'interactivity', the value of online quizzes, determining transparent criteria for assessing online group work, embedding generic attributes in online assessment, criterion-referenced assessment, assessing international students online and the impact of university assessment policy; and (4) educational developers' perspectives on assessment were represented in three models: assessment online in traditional campuses, assessment online with a supported model in traditional campuses and a strategic, off-campus/off-shore model for assessment conducted online.

The most significant finding from a theoretical perspective was in relation to the term *e-assessment* or *online assessment*. Despite widespread usage of the term in the literature on assessment, respondents did not recognise e-assessment as a separate category of assessment. Assessment that was conducted in an online environment was conceptualised by educational developers in the same way as assessment in face-to-face settings, or assessment conducted in

print, or any other mode. After the primary learning and assessment issues had been resolved, however, a secondary consideration was how to design assessment most efficiently for the online environment to optimise the enabling features of the technologies and the learning affordances they offered. It was only in this context that the term *e-assessment* was significant.