

Self-assessment in an open online environment: affordances and practices

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Self-assessment in an open online environment: affordances and practices

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Abstract. In open online education the concept of self-assessment (Taras, 2010) deserves special attention and may even need to be operationalized anew. The ability of participants of massive open online courses (MOOCs) to evaluate their own learning, its quality and progress, gains in importance. In contrast with formal education and schooling, MOOCs are learner-driven by default. MOOC participants choose open online courses based on their personal learning goals and needs. They may drop-in if interested or drop-out if the selected MOOC does not offer what they are looking for. Learners determine themselves whether they have learned enough. The value of MOOC certificates issued upon completion and possible revenues of such certificates lie to a great extent in the eye of the beholder.

MOOCs use peer- and self-assessments extensively both for formative and summative assessment purposes. While accepted as scalable alternatives for teacher-led assessments, they are criticized as being of limited validity (Admiral, Huisman & van der Ven, 2014).

Considering the fact that MOOC learners are free to pursue their individual learning goals that may differ from the goals set by MOOC designers, it is even more difficult that in regular education to see self-assessment performed by a MOOC learner as a snapshot of learning framed in the course goals and measured against the pre-defined learning outcomes. Such a self-assessment is, however, a valid approximation of a judgment of learning in relation to one's own learning goals or objectives (Boud, 1995). Such judgments are valuable no matter whether a MOOC participant completes a MOOC or drops out at some point. They enable learners in generating feedback (how have I done so far?), feed-forward (what should I do next?) and feed-up (what is the distance to my personal learning goals?) (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), thus, turning into a potentially important learning tool and an affordance for deep learning.

In MOOCs both designed and emerging self-assessments depend on available technologies and their affordances. Learners determine, however, whether these technologies are used as intended, to what extent and to what effect. Studying MOOC self-assessment practice can help understand the mechanisms that underlie MOOC learning and inform design.

The paper will present a study of two instances of MOOC implementations from the point of view of self-assessment as it was designed and materialized in

practice. The paper will be concluded with suggestions for self-assessment design that takes the specific nature of open learning into account.

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