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Evaluation methods as an effective tool for the development of students' learning

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Abstract

Evaluation is a complementary and inseparable part of any educational process. It plays a crucial role in any student's learning. The purpose of this article is to discuss how different evaluation methods can enhance students' learning, particularly in the Course of Academic Writing, which is taught as an optional subject at the Faculty of Informatics and Management of the University of Hradec Kralove in the Czech Republic. Firstly, the term evaluation is discussed. Secondly, different evaluation methods used in the course are explored with a special focus on self-reflection essays, which help both the teacher in her work and students in their learning. In addition, students' authentic pieces of evaluation are used to provide concrete examples.

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1. Introduction

Evaluation is an inseparable part of any education process since it plays a crucial role in any student's learning. The course evaluation is considered to be one of the very valuable tools of teaching and learning because it can provide useful feedback both for teachers and their institution about the quality of education. Moreover, it can reveal its impact on student's learning and teacher's practices (FrydrychovaKlimova, 2013).

Sometimes evaluation is wrongly understood as an assessment. As Watson (2014) claims, *one could look at assessment and evaluation as the journey (assessment) versus the snapshot (evaluation)*. The assessment requires the gathering of evidence of students' performance over a period of time to measure their learning and understanding.

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The evaluation, on the other hand, occurs when a mark is assigned after the completion of a task, test, quiz, lesson or learning activity. A mark on a spelling test will determine if the child can spell the given words and would be seen as an evaluation.

2. Evaluation methods in the course of academic writing

The evaluation can have different forms. There are two main approaches to the course evaluation: informal/personal and formal/institutional. In this article the author discusses just the informal course evaluation methods. In the Course of Academic Writing, which is an optional, one-semester course taught as a blended course at the Faculty of Informatics and Management of the University of Hradec Kralove, the following evaluation methods are used: *teacher's evaluation of students' essays*; *course evaluation questionnaires*; and *course self-reflective essays*.

The *teacher's evaluation of students' essays* provides information about student results and their performance as far as their academic writing is concerned. There is usually a final evaluation of five assignments/ essays students write during the course. Therefore the teacher can see whether students are making any progress or not and reflect on their work and her teaching practices in order to make necessary changes in learning and teaching strategies. The teacher assesses these assignments every second week and uses analytic scoring. The teacher (the author of this article) follows Bacha (2001) – Jacobs et al. (1981) model. She slightly adapted their model since the Czech learners of English have different language use needs. The most frequent errors for the Czech learners are the use of articles, word order, indirect speech, agreement in subject and predicate, countable versus uncountable nouns, and prepositions. In addition, since the course is also run partly online, students are exposed to double feedback on their essays. Firstly, after submitting their essay via the virtual learning environment Blackboard, they receive from their teacher a general written commentary on their writing performance. Then, at the beginning of the following contact lesson, students once more discuss their errors in class.

Each semester students attending the course are given a *course evaluation questionnaire* whose feedback can help the course teacher to reflect on her teaching practices and modify them accordingly afterwards if there are such needs. See Appendix A about the course evaluation questionnaire. Overall, students respond very positively; they are usually very satisfied with the course structure, pleasant atmosphere in the class, with the feedback on their written work and the exploitation of each lesson to the maximum. Moreover, they would recommend the course to other students at the faculty because they find it beneficial for their future career.

Probably the most effective method of the course evaluation is a *self-reflective essay*. The self-reflective essay brings about many advantages, both for the students and the teacher. Generally, the self-reflection is a good way for students to learn about their experience, experiences, learning preferences and think critically about what they have learned. It is also a valuable source for teachers, too, since they can reconsider their teaching methods, strategies or activities.

Thus, when writing the self-reflective essay, students get enriched in the following ways:

- they become aware of their strengths and weaknesses;
- they expand their cognitive skills;
- they increase their metacognitive skills, particularly critically thinking skills;
- they develop their writing skills;
- they become aware of their learning styles;
- it helps students to develop their personality (cf. Pikhart, 2012) ;
- it might encourage self-motivation or self-directed learning;
- it may make students more responsible for their learning.

However, one also has to bear in mind the drawbacks of the reflective essay writing, which includes the fact that:

- some students can be too critical of teacher's approaches;
- they may feel uncomfortable about it, or they may not have to reveal all their weaknesses and strengths;

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