

Designing online assessment for improved student learning and experience

Roy Wybrow

James Cook University, Douglas, Australia
roy.wybrow@jcu.edu.au

Pauline Taylor

James Cook University, Douglas, Australia
Pauline.Taylor1@jcu.edu.au

David Smorfitt

James Cook University, Douglas, Australia
david.smorfitt@jcu.edu.au

Australian universities are experiencing a period of unprecedented complexity in providing quality higher education experiences for an increasingly diverse student body. Institutions are grappling with ways to tackle and respond to conflating pressures of reduced resourcing, Federal government participation targets, flexibility of provision and increased accountability. Universities are increasingly turning to online learning spaces as a solution. This paper first provides a rationale for the conceptual frameworks used in the research design. It then presents the findings from the first phase of a mixed-method study which investigated first year students' experiences of online assessment at one Australian university. Using an innovative methodological and conceptual (design thinking) approach, the inquiry found that deeper understandings of students' lived experiences were important in online assessment design. Where design was attentive to students' life-worlds, participants were positive about online assessment regardless of age, gender or previous experiences with technology and reported that it facilitated improved learning. The study provides valuable insights into particular challenges transitioning students encounter in juggling competing life/study priorities and design elements of online assessment that impact positively on the student experience. These understandings have relevance for online assessment and course design generally and contribute to wider equity debates centring on the student learning environment and experience.