

Presentation session

Reducing Turnaround Time: Electronic Marking Using the Tablet PC

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In order to overcome known difficulties associated with studying externally and provide a quality learning environment, CQUniversity Mathematics Learning Centre's (MLC) course developers are guided by the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering & Gamsen, 1987) that are endorsed by the CQUniversity Academic Board. According to the Seven Principles, good practice in undergraduate education:

1. Encourages contact between students and staff
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. Encourages active learning
4. Gives prompt feedback
5. Emphasises time on task
6. Communicates high expectations
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

This presentation seeks to explore the electronic marking of assessment via the Tablet PC, how this relates to the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education and student feedback. A significant issue at many universities is the lengthy turnaround time for returning assessment to students. As the main purpose of formative assessment, in particular, is to provide timely effective feedback to students before they progress further in the course, a turnaround time of almost two weeks is counterproductive. In order to address this issue the Mathematics Learning Centre (MLC) at CQUniversity (CQU) moved to electronic marking in 2006. A survey of external students conducted by the MLC found students not only appreciated the quick turnaround but found the handwritten annotations facilitated by the Tablet PC invaluable.

Some scholars such as Hume (2001) find that the writing surface of the Tablet PC produces poor quality writing and has the effect of making bad writing worse. Our initial survey confirmed that it is not the quality of the writing that is important to students but the quality of the feedback that is provided. We use our formative assessment as a teaching tool. Mistakes are highlighted and the problem is reworked correctly demonstrating correct working and setting out. Extra annotations are added as required to aid the students understanding.

We (MLC) now have been using Tablet PCs to electronically mark for almost five years and students regularly comment on how quickly we mark their work. We are currently measuring the effectiveness of our current system and how students respond to the changes implemented in response to our initial survey. We will report on this in the future.