**Assessment for the New Learner**

Assessment is without doubt one of the major ''drivers'' of the teaching-learning process. ([Brown, 1996](#_ENREF_1)) However, assessment is not just about grading and examinations. It is about getting to know our students and the quality of their learning and to use this knowledge and understanding to their benefit.

We need to keep in mind the new learner. There is a generational difference in the type of learners that we have today. The ‘older’ learners, who happen to also be in many cases the instructors, come from an era where technology was not the main mode of delivering information. However, many ‘digital natives’ as they are referred to today prefer to receive information quickly, they prefer multi-tasking, they have a low tolerance for being ‘talked at’, they prefer active rather than passive learning, and they rely heavily on communication technologies to access information and to carry out social and professional goals. I heard that if you ask a student today to name three things that they needed for their university schooling they would name three requirements: continual access to the internet, ability to access their work anywhere and a current mobile communication device.

Learning today is becoming more and more a continuous, connected and collaborative process. It happens on the job, in the job, outside of the job and when not on the job so why on earth do we continue to evaluate our learners as if the only way competence exchange occurs is within the four physical walls of a classroom?([Pontefract, 2011](#_ENREF_4)) Learning professionals should be evaluating the improvement of network connections, competence and behavior, which correlates to improved engagement and performance. ([Pontefract, 2011](#_ENREF_4))

There is benefit in assessing informal learning but not by applying the same set of parameters used for assessing formal learning. There are two important distinctions between formal and informal learning that include; WHO drives the learning and HOW does the learning happen. Formal learning is driven by an external source. The individual drives informal learning. Informal learning is changing with advances in social media and can often happen in ‘conversations’ with others such as exchanges that occur while tweeting, blogging, messaging, and texting.

But the question remains; how do we assess informal learning? How can we add value to the effort spent in doing this learning? How can assessments of informal learning benefit the learner?

***References***

Brown, S. R., Phil; and Smith, Brenda. (1996, 2005). An Assessment Manifesto. *Deliberations*, 2011, from <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/deliberations>

Pontefract, D. (2011). Time's Up - learning will forever be part formal, part informal and part social. *Chief Learning Officer 10,* 50.