

An international online survey of the practices and perceptions of higher education professors with respect to the assessment of learning in the classroom

Jean-Luc Gilles , Pascal Detroz & Jean-Guy Blais

To cite this article: Jean-Luc Gilles , Pascal Detroz & Jean-Guy Blais (2011) An international online survey of the practices and perceptions of higher education professors with respect to the assessment of learning in the classroom, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 36:6, 719-733, DOI: [10.1080/02602938.2010.484880](https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2010.484880)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2010.484880>



Published online: 20 Jul 2010.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 524



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 5 View citing articles [↗](#)

An international online survey of the practices and perceptions of higher education professors with respect to the assessment of learning in the classroom

Jean-Luc Gilles^{a*}, Pascal Detroz^b and Jean-Guy Blais^c

^aNational and International Relations Unit, Haute Ecole Pédagogique Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland; ^bSystème Méthodologique d'Aide à la Réalisation de Tests, Université de Liège, Liège, Belgium; ^cFaculty of Education, Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada

In a context where public action must demonstrate its effectiveness and efficiency, and where the links between teaching and the quality of learning are regularly highlighted, it seems relevant to identify the trends and logic that govern university professors' decisions with respect to the modes of learning assessment favoured within the framework of their delivery of teaching services. Moreover, given that university teaching practices are changing rapidly due to the introduction of different views of the learning process, one might conclude that the same holds for assessment practices. Through our research work, we led to the development of a trilingual (English, French and Spanish) online survey devoted to an international investigation into the classroom assessment practices of higher education teachers. This survey proposes an online platform that will allow institutions of higher learning to document some of their current practices and to compare observed trends with what is happening elsewhere, in accordance with differing missions and traditions. These research notes are thus intended to describe the survey itself and to show how the questionnaire and individual items were structured, in addition to providing an overview of treatments within and between institutions that followed the testing.

Keywords: assessment practices; assessment perception; scholarship of assessment; learning assessment; student assessment

Introduction

The PraDES project is a trilingual (English, French and Spanish) online survey devoted to an international investigation into the classroom assessment practices of higher education professors (the PraDES project: www.smart.ulg.ac.be/prades). These research notes are intended, on the one hand, to describe the PraDES survey, its objectives, the types of access that were made available to institutions wishing to participate, and the dissemination policy employed; on the other hand, it will show how the questionnaire and its items were structured, in addition to providing some examples of treatments within and between institutions that followed the testing of the francophone version of the questionnaire in three universities, two in Belgium and one in Canada. Presenting the data-processing perspectives makes it possible to illustrate this survey's capacity to show differences within and between institutions in the domain of assessment practices, which can also be explained by a series of items on professors' perceptions of the role of assessment.

*Corresponding author. Email: jean-luc.gilles@hepl.ch

Through these research notes on the PraDES study, we invite all persons who are interested in classroom assessment practices at the higher education level to take part in this project, and we encourage universities to participate in the survey.

Emergence of ‘scholarship of assessments’ in the university system

For someone outside the university system, the scope of assessment-related activities (including different types of assessments: from learning assessments in classrooms to external audits) conducted there is often quite surprising. Astin (1993, 1) made a very appropriate observation when he remarked that in North American universities almost everything is evaluated and almost all members of the university community are involved in evaluating something or somebody. This observation is probably truer now than it was 15 years ago, since such activities have been extended throughout the world. Students are evaluated upon admission to university and in each course they take, and they are asked more and more frequently to evaluate their professors’ teaching practices. Programmes are regularly reviewed by administrators and some institutions must face external audits by accreditation organisations. Professors evaluate each other’s performances when it is time for tenure confirmation and newcomers are evaluated when recruited and again when hired.

Given that assessment-related activities have become more widespread in higher education, it would appear normal that some researchers study them closely. As a matter of fact, this is exactly what has happened in the last 20 years, as research on university assessment practices has taken off and sparked repeated calls for the creation of a community dedicated to the ‘scholarship of assessment’ in higher education (see, for example, Banta et al. 1996; Mentkowski and Loacker 2002; Stefani 2004–2005; Rust 2007).

The lack of data to draw up comparative profiles of classroom assessment practices

In this context, numerous publications have been devoted to the assessment of learning in the classroom, listing available practices and tools and describing each one’s advantages in terms of context and tradition. However, we currently do not possess enough data to draw up a comparative profile of practices across different institutions, disciplinary traditions and countries. Romainville (2006) reminds us, by the way, that knowledge of this specific aspect of assessment is incomplete and fragmentary. From his perspective, only a handful of studies have made systematic comparisons of assessment practices along these lines. He cites three: that of Warren Piper (1994) on external evaluators in UK universities; that of the Agence de Modernisation des Universités (AMUE 2001); and that of Blais et al. (1997), conducted at the Université de Montréal and its affiliated schools (Canada). But none of these studies adopted a truly global comparative point of view (between institutions and countries, and within disciplinary traditions).

Given the dearth of publications on comparative classroom assessment practices, one might be tempted to question the relevance of gathering data on the subject. But these concerns are closely related to a movement towards quality assessment that, since the early 1990s, has reached into almost all European and North American institutions (Kaufman 1992; Kauffman, Dupont, and Philippart 1995; Segers and Dochy 1996; Lim 1999; Messick 1999). Moreover, this movement is itself part of a global trend that has seen quality control mechanisms introduced into all levels of education

(Ramsden 1991; Nightingale and O'Neil 1994; Zink and Schmidt 1995; Segers, Dochy, and Cascallar 2003). In a context where public action must demonstrate its effectiveness and efficiency, and where the links between teaching and the quality of learning are regularly highlighted, it seems relevant to identify the trends and logic that govern university professors' decisions with respect to the modes of learning assessment favoured within the framework of their delivery of teaching services. Moreover, given that university teaching practices are changing rapidly due to the introduction of different views of the learning process, one might conclude that the same holds for assessment practices. For the moment, however, we are in the dark about such matters.

These, then, are the objectives we have pursued through research work that led to the development of a trilingual (English, French and Spanish) online survey devoted to an international investigation into the classroom assessment practices of higher education professors (the *PraDES* project: www.smart.ulg.ac.be/prades). A basic premise of this survey is that classroom assessment practices are quite diversified and not well documented. They would thus reflect professors' values and perceptions – subject, however, to environmental variables such as institutional selectivity, class size, level of education (undergraduate or graduate), disciplinary tradition, cultural differences, etc. This survey, in line with the 'scholarship of assessment' tradition as presented by Banta and associates (2002) and Stefani (2004–2005), proposes an online platform that will allow institutions of higher learning to document some of their current practices and to compare observed trends with what is happening elsewhere, in accordance with differing missions and traditions.

Goals of the project

The goals of this project are, therefore, to become more familiar with the broad range of classroom assessment practices used by professors around the world and to gather data on professors' perceptions of the role of assessment. These data should also help university services or organisations that guide professors in the application of effective student assessment mechanisms. Our main objective is not to extend conclusions based on data gathered from a sub-group to the entire population of professors at a given university. Rather, it is to familiarise ourselves with the diversity of their practices and perceptions, privileging analytical approaches within institutions as much as comparisons by institution and country. Data thus gathered are difficult to generalise, first because, in surveys such as this, there is always a variable response rate across participating institutions and second because, to answer some of the items, respondents are asked to select one of the courses they teach and to forward contextual information (class size, level of education, hours, etc.). So we cannot know if the course chosen is representative of all the courses given, nor can we claim that the picture is accurate or could be generalised to all of the courses given by a specific professor. Asking the professors to answer the items for each of their courses would have made the questionnaire too long and impracticable. Of course this is a limitation of the investigation but, based on what was learned in Blais et al.'s (1997) study, we can foresee very interesting ways of using the data collected. Since the perception items of the questionnaire are not related to any specific course, it should be interesting to link them to assessment practices. The information collected through this survey could be very useful to help professors improve their assessment practices and better understand their methodological choices. This will contribute to improve the support of those who are preoccupied with their assessment practices.

The survey

In 1995, an interdisciplinary research group from the Université de Montréal (GRIPU) conducted a survey on practices and perceptions with regard to the assessment of classroom learning at the university and its affiliated schools. This is still one of the most significant surveys ever conducted in the francophone world and we have not found anything equivalent in the English-speaking research community. More than a decade after this survey, two research groups, one from the Université de Liège (SMART) in Belgium and one from the Université de Montréal (GRIÉMEtic) in Canada, are proposing to replicate it. Converging interests have led them to produce a new questionnaire using some of the items from the earlier one and taking into account new practices linked to technological advances that have occurred since. The survey questionnaire is currently available in English, French and Spanish, and has been used by six universities located on three continents. A German and a Dutch version are also on the agenda. According to modalities to be discussed, the researchers in charge of the project are open to versions in other languages.

How to access the questionnaire

We wish to fill the lack of data about assessment practices that take place in higher education and put them into context. Besides, we wish to share these data with all those who are interested in the issue of learning assessment in higher education. Therefore, we must include as many institutions as possible in the survey process, which is why we imagine a web-based approach to collect the data.

Designed to collect and share a large data-set that should facilitate rich and relevant comparisons, the PraDES international survey is open to all institutions of higher learning that wish to participate in this investigation. Requests can be made by contacting the authors, and additional information on the survey and on scientific partnerships can be accessed via the project website: www.smart.ulg.ac.be/prades.

To be part of the project a participating institution must transmit the following information to the person in charge of the operational side of the project:

- (1) A letter from the director of the institution confirming that it supports the survey and agreeing to the dissemination of the questionnaire via the Internet.
- (2) The text of the email message that will be used to invite professors to respond to the questionnaire.
- (3) A list of the statuses of the various professors (assistant, associate, etc.) so that the questionnaire can be adapted accordingly.
- (4) A list of the different faculties so the questionnaire can be adapted accordingly.
- (5) If relevant, a list of additional items of specific interest to the institution (with a limit set by the person in charge of operations as to how many items can be added).

The questionnaire

The sections

The questionnaire uses most of the items in the 1995 GRIPU survey. Computerising it enabled us to employ a nested design, which in turn made it possible to achieve greater precision and to enhance the diagnostic value of certain concepts. In addition,

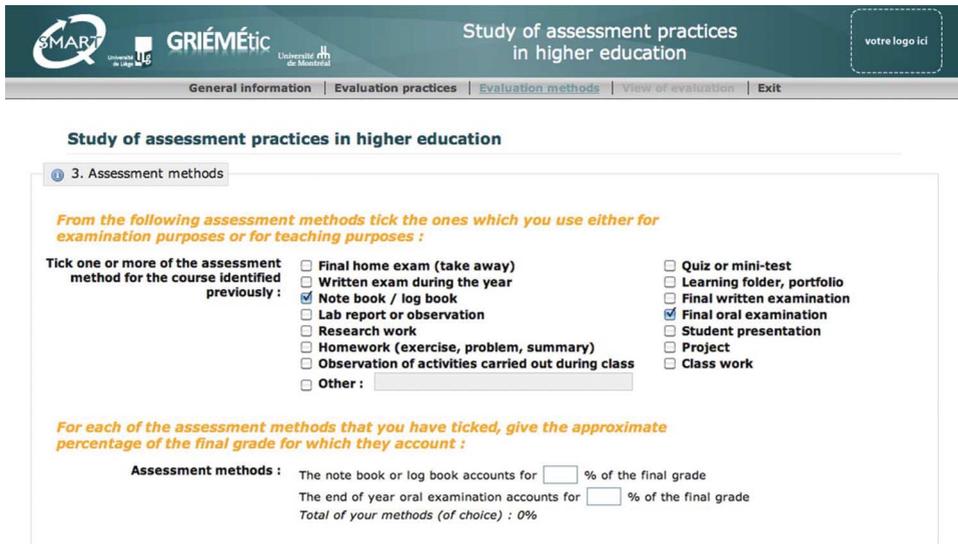


Figure 1. Example of an online survey interface.

some new items related to the use of assessment technology were added. The questionnaire is divided into four sections:

- General information
- Classroom assessment practices
- Classroom assessment tools and assessment-related decisions
- Perceptions of classroom assessment goals

The survey comprises a possible total of 361 items but, given that some items are nested in others, a particular respondent should answer, on average, fewer than 200 items. The entire process should take around 20 minutes. Figure 1 shows the proposed interface for the third section of the questionnaire.

Item formats

Items where respondents choose from one of several options

These are of two kinds: single response and multiple responses. Respondents are usually asked to shade, or put a check mark in, a square. The e-form also allows for dropdown lists. Moreover, certain closed-format questions come with an additional option called, quite simply, ‘Other’. Figure 2 shows an example of this type of item,

What is the course level :

- Undergraduate
- Masters
- Ph.D.

Type of course :

- Introductory course
- Specialised course
- Practical or vocational training

Figure 2. Example of a closed-choice item (PraDES 2008).

which is taken from the ‘General information’ section of the questionnaire. Note that this type of item has been systematically adapted according to each institutional context. For example, if a university has no law school or faculty, this option would not appear in the dropdown list.

Frequency scales

In the third section on assessment tools, respondents are asked to express the frequency of assessment activities (always, often, rarely, never) related to the specific course they have in mind when reporting on their practices and tools. The respondent can also choose the ‘Does not apply’ option if the item is not relevant to his or her case. An example of this kind of item is presented in Figure 3.

Items related to perceptions of the role of assessment

A major section of the questionnaire contains items pertaining to respondents’ perceptions of the role of classroom assessment. Responses are given on a Likert scale with four options (totally agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, totally disagree) and there is a fifth option (not relevant) if the item content is judged irrelevant. Figure 4 shows an example of this type of item.

Items where respondents can formulate their own answer

Finally, there are two types of open-ended items, one allowing for a short answer (a percentage, a number of students, number of hours, etc.) and one permitting a much longer answer, where respondents can express themselves more freely. For example, in the ‘Perceptions of classroom assessment goals’ section, there is an item that asks respondents what they consider the main goal of assessment in higher learning to be. Other items, however, combine a single response with long or short open-ended formats. Figure 5 shows an example taken from the third section of the questionnaire.

Please express your level of agreement with the following statements. These relate to the course which you have chosen.

| | Always | Often | Rarely | Never | Not relevant |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| I base myself on the course objectives when I prepare my methods of assessment | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| My colleagues assist in the choice of assessment methods | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| I develop my exams from a bank of existing questions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |

Figure 3. Example of an item pertaining to the frequency of assessment-related activities based on course objectives (PraDES 2008).

Give your level of agreement with the following propositions. These items relate to the course that you have previously chosen.

| | Totally agree | mostly agree | mostly disagree | totally disagree | not relevant |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| It is important to cover the entire subject during a qualifying exam | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| Assessing students requires knowledge linked to the field of evaluation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| My knowledge of assessment allows me to better assess my students | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |

Figure 4. Item pertaining to perceptions of the goals of classroom assessment (PraDES 2008).

Are there any particular constraints limiting your choice when it comes to evaluating students ?

Are there any constraints ? Yes
 No

If yes, please specify :

Figure 5. An item combining a single-response format with a long or short open-ended format (PraDES 2008).

Relevant data analysis

In this section, various data-processing options are illustrated by means of examples derived from the questionnaire as administered by GRIPU at the Université de Liège and the Université de Mons in 2008, and at the Université de Montréal in 1995. The Canadian survey was presented on paper, while the Belgian ones were completed online, using a working version of the current computerised version.

The 1995 survey was sent out to 3766 university professors and lecturers associated with the Université de Montréal and its affiliated schools (École Polytechnique de Montréal and HEC-Montréal). Of these, 643 (16%) were deemed usable for further analysis. In the Liège survey, administered in January 2008, the questionnaire targeted 598 individuals (tenured and invited professors, lecturers, etc.). After a reminder was issued, the number of respondents rose to 214, but not all of them answered all the questions, so the final count of usable questionnaires was 194 (32%). In Mons, the survey was administered on 8 April 2008, with support from the rector. After one reminder was issued, 57 of the 81 questionnaires sent out (70%) came back in a state suitable for further analysis.

These three surveys clearly illustrate some of the constraints inherent to this type of project. With over 40,000 students, the Université de Montréal may be considered a large university by Canadian standards. By Belgian standards on the other hand, the Université de Liège is a medium-sized institution, while Mons is a small university. The universities' respective response rates of 16%, 32% and 70% can probably be explained by differences in size and the technology used, i.e. paper versus electronic formats. Different sizes also imply different missions, which means that some overall comparisons would not always be appropriate. A small university would probably not have an engineering school or a medical faculty. On the other hand, a big university would probably favour large classes at the undergraduate level. If our hypothesis is right and the assessment practices and tools used in universities are limited by class size, disciplinary traditions and faculty, some global comparisons would be more or less relevant, and differences and similarities should be examined in light of very precise variables. Nevertheless, the goal of the analysis presented in this paper is not to give the full detailed results of the three surveys mentioned, but to show by means of a few concrete examples the type of data that is at our disposal, and to make a convincing case for participation in such a survey as a road to understanding local and international issues.

Let us underline, the exemplary nature of the analyses that are presented below. They only intend to show all the potential of the PraDES survey concerning the issue of higher education teachers' docimological practices.

Comparisons and analyses within institutions

Through this survey and the exchanges that it arouses within the universities partnerships, we wish to improve the quality of the learning assessments in higher education. In this context, the comparison and the analysis of the PraDES survey's results within institutions allow us to better understand the decision processes in relation with the assessment-related choices of the professors. It also contributes to the improvement of the methodological support offered by the teams who accompany the teachers.

Examinations as assessment tools in relation to class size and type of faculty

According to Blais et al. (1997, 124–7) and Astin (1993, 81–93) various constraints weigh heavily on professors' assessment-related decisions: education regulations, subjects taught, class size, type of teaching employed, the collegiality or non-collegiality of instruction, students' demands, etc. Among these, class size can have a major impact (and perhaps an even greater impact than the subjects taught by a given faculty) on the kinds of items included in an exam. How do matters stand, for example, at the Université de Liège?

We grouped the 194 respondents in four categories defined by the size of the classes that were evaluated:

- Very small (fewer than 26 students): $n = 69$
- Small (from 26 to 60 students): $n = 34$
- Large (from 61 to 250 students): $n = 68$
- Very large (more than 250 students): $n = 23$

The breakdown could have been different, of course, but it will do as an example.

Table 1 gives the frequencies with which certain types of items were included in exams given to classes corresponding to the four size categories listed above.

We can see that, for very small groups, the long-answer type is mainly favoured (35% of the respondents say this type of item is part of the exam), followed by problem solving (25%) and short answer questions (20%). For small groups, again we find that long answers (42%) and short ones (26%) are mostly used. For large and very large groups, however, the picture changes noticeably. The multiple-choice question becomes the favoured item type for very large groups (28%), while the long answer

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages for different types of assessment items included on exams given by respondents from the Université de Liège, in relation to class size.

| | | Sentence to complete | Short answer | Short essay | Long essay | Problems | Demonstration | True–false | MCQ | Other |
|----------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|----------|---------------|------------|-----|-------|
| Very small groups | <i>n</i> | 0 | 8 | 26 | 46 | 33 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 10 |
| | % | 0 | 6 | 20 | 35 | 25 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| Small groups | <i>n</i> | 0 | 2 | 15 | 24 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| | % | 0 | 4 | 26 | 42 | 12 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Large groups | <i>n</i> | 4 | 11 | 36 | 41 | 31 | 8 | 12 | 16 | 9 |
| | % | 2 | 7 | 21 | 24 | 18 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 5 |
| Very large groups | <i>n</i> | 0 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 15 | 5 |
| | % | 0 | 15 | 11 | 17 | 11 | 6 | 2 | 28 | 9 |

type is much less in evidence with large groups. These data argue for a link between class size and item type, and suggest that the larger the class the more multiple-choice items are included in exams. But a finer analysis (made possible by the questionnaire) would also show differences related to disciplines and to the relative weight of these item types. There is a huge difference between exams when the respective weights for multiple-choice items are 100% and 10%.

Perceptions of the role of the assessment

As Figure 6 shows, with regard to the item ‘Assessing students requires knowledge linked to the field of assessment’, there was almost unanimous agreement across the faculties that the assessment component of the professors’ duties necessitates competency in that area. We can conclude that, in the view of respondents, assessment cannot be improvised and that a basic level of preparation is required to carry it out effectively. Item 7, which went a little deeper into the idea of an assessment knowledge base, asked respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement ‘My knowledge of assessment allows me to better assess my students’.

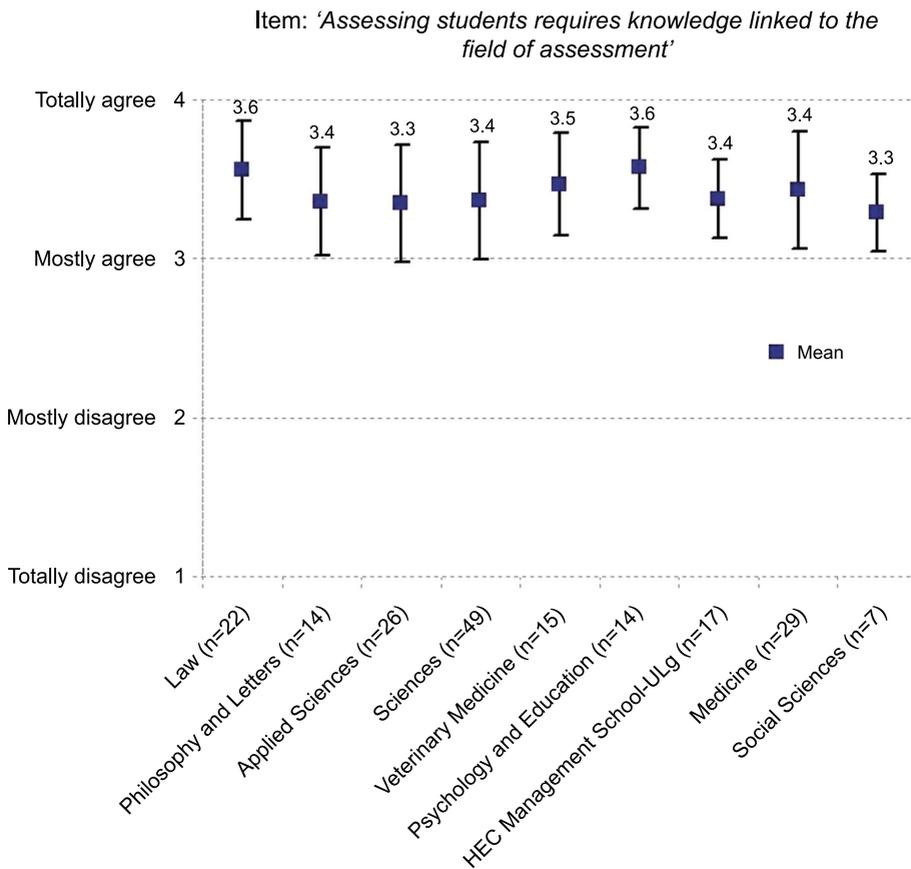


Figure 6. First example concerning an item about the perceptions of the role of assessment (PraDES 2008).

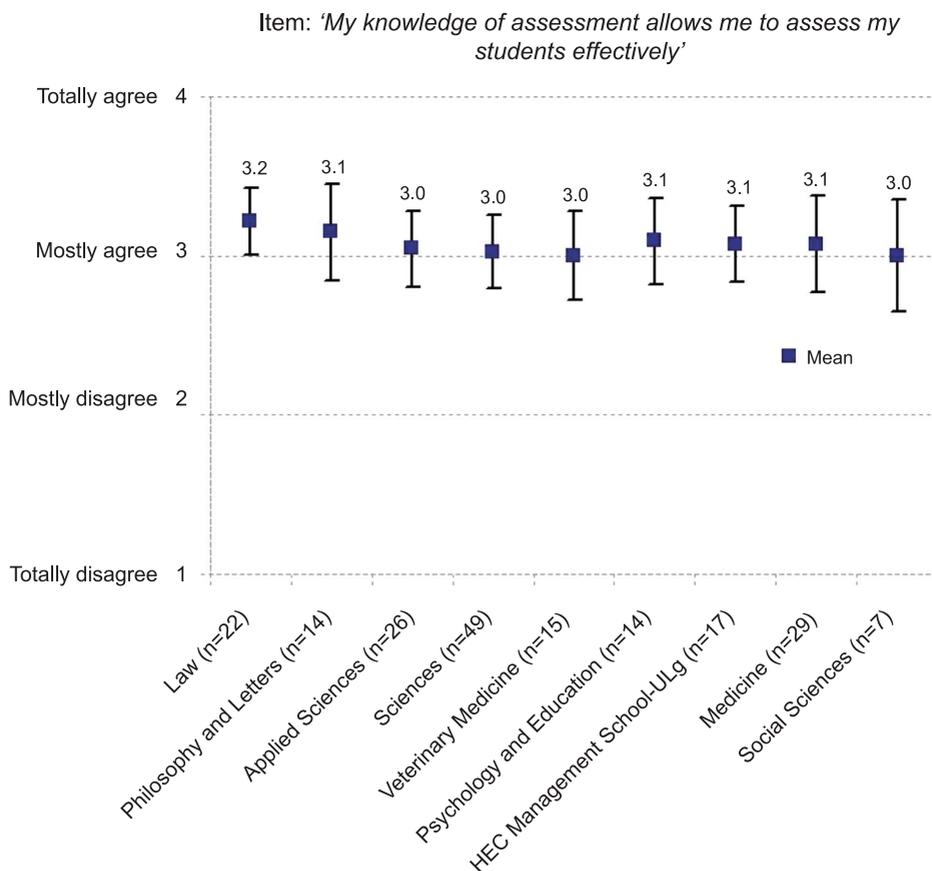


Figure 7. Second example concerning an item about the perceptions of the role of assessment (PraDES 2008).

Overall, respondents agreed with the statement, but to a lesser extent than that shown for Item 6. Such information could be useful for those in charge of continuing training services at the university (Figure 7).

Analysis of constraints

Through a series of open questions, the survey also offered some options for more qualitative analysis. Respondents were asked, for example, 'Are there any particular constraints limiting your choices when it comes to assessing students?' Those who answered in the affirmative were also asked to provide details. Figure 8 shows, broken down according to class size, the percentages of Liège respondents who acknowledged the existence of constraints. Moreover, these percentages increased with class size. An analysis of the answers provided by these professors to explain their constraints shows that class size was the strongest factor (41%). A good many of the other explanations given can be broken down into two categories of constraint: the sophistication of certain assessment instruments (24%) used to evaluate complex tasks, and the time available to put together assessment tools (22%). Adjusting for

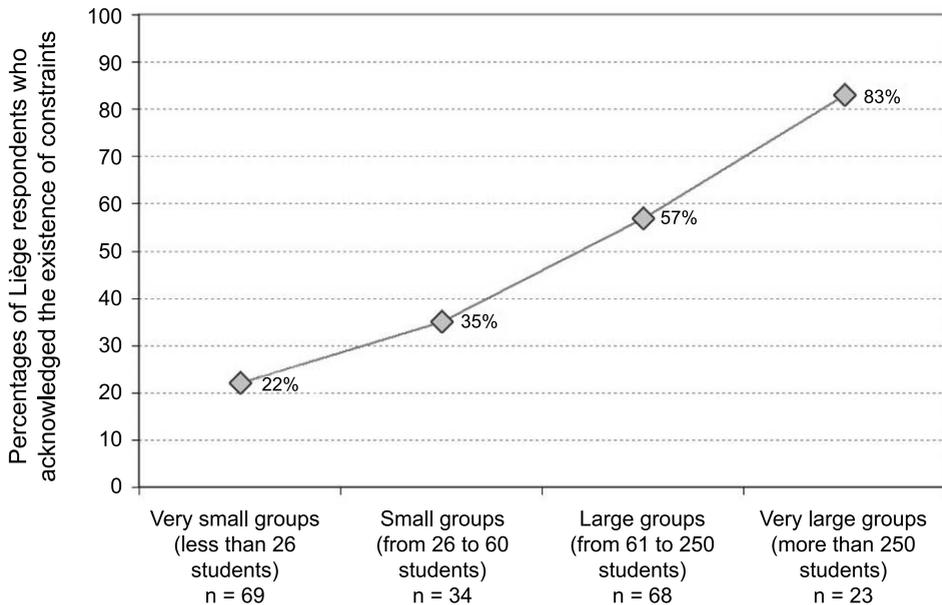


Figure 8. Class size and the percentage of respondents mentioning constraints.

group size we observed that professors dealing with large or very large groups almost exclusively adduced class size as an explanation for the constraints placed upon them (see Figure 9). It would thus seem that, above a certain threshold of group size, this constraint dwarfs all others.

Comparisons of institutions

With some of the items it is possible to compare various institutional contexts. Figure 10 illustrates this by comparing the frequency with which the three universities (Montréal, Liège and Mons) used certain tools to gather data for assessment purposes. As we have already mentioned, however, such comparisons can often be misleading and it is important to keep in mind that Figure 10 illustrates the potential of such data for comparing institutions and countries (remember that the survey at Université de Montréal was done more than 10 years before the two others).

We were not surprised to learn that the three surveys cited the written examination as the tool most frequently used to evaluate students. But the second means mentioned most frequently by respondents at Liège and Mons, the 'oral examination' (52% and 43%, respectively), was mentioned very infrequently in the 1995 survey at the Université de Montréal. The second most frequently used instrument at the Université de Montréal at this time would have been the 'written exam during the academic year' (57%), which was used more rarely at Liège (19%) and Mons (26%). 'Homework' was also mentioned much more often at the Université de Montréal (44%) than it was at Liège (13%) and Mons (18%). Other visible differences were related to 'research work' and 'lab reports'.

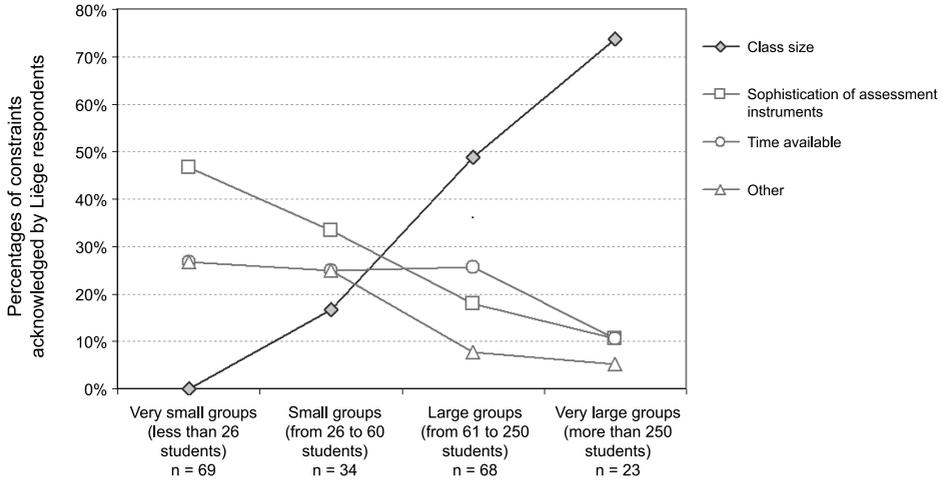


Figure 9. Constraints and group size related to students' assessment limitations.

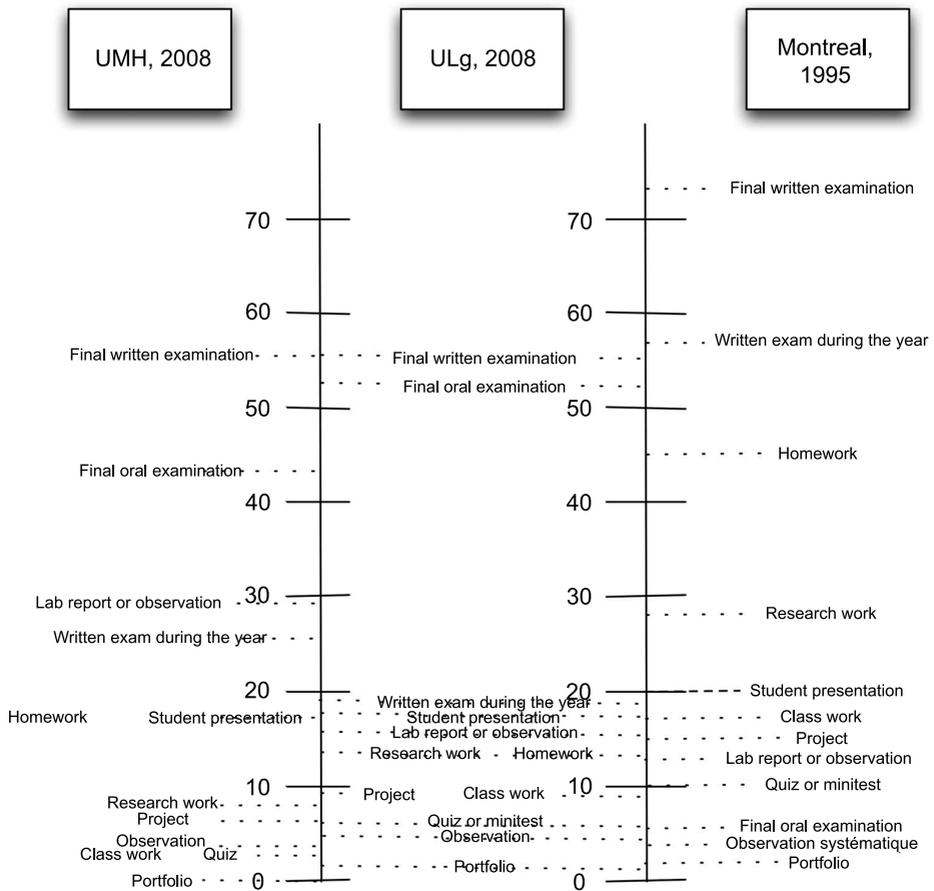


Figure 10. Assessment instruments used at the universities of Liège and Mons (2008) and at Université de Montréal (1995).

Conclusion and outlook

Taking into account a worldwide tendency towards quality management in institutions of higher learning, the latter are being called upon more and more to confirm the quality of instruction (Ramsden 1991; Nightingale and O'Neil 1994; Zink and Schmidt 1995; Lim 1999; Segers, Dochy, and Cascallar 2003; Gilles 2005; Blais 2008; Gilles and Detroz 2008). On the outside, society requires guarantees for graduate competency levels and, on the inside, students ask for reliable and fair assessment practices. Answers to these external and internal pressures require more information on how professors evaluate students in the classroom setting and more transparency on how assessment is conducted at this level.

Concurrently, many large universities have put together services in support of teaching that are also mandated to support classroom assessment-related activities. Often, these services must be provided in a large-scale setting such as Europe or some emerging countries, where 'we are far away from the ideal of some prestigious North American universities with a ratio of one professor for 20 students' (Dupont and Ossandon 1994, 15). Specialised units dedicated to classroom assessment have emerged in many institutions of higher learning. These units have a counselling role but often, due to important contextual differences, they are confronted with the reality of greatly diversified classroom assessment practices, precluding a single solution to all the problems encountered. In institutions of higher learning, contrary to what is generally observed at the primary and secondary levels of schooling, many different factors can influence the choice of means used to evaluate student performance. As a matter of fact, research in the field of classroom assessment in higher education must be based on a good knowledge of the contextual environment leading to choices of models and tools, otherwise the data obtained will have a very limited usefulness in helping to create scholarship in classroom assessment. Unfortunately, there is very little reporting of systematic data collection on this matter. The proposed survey thus focused on putting together a large contextualised database that would benefit researchers in the field of classroom assessment in higher education, as well as all those interested in knowing what is happening in other disciplines, faculties, institutions and countries.

Through the proposed international survey and exchanges between the participating institutions we intend to better understand why certain choices are made and to increase the quality of student assessment in higher education. After some preliminary results from six institutions we can already see the benefits of the survey and its impact on the creation of a community of researchers and practitioners interested in building a better 'evidence-based' body of knowledge on classroom assessment in higher education.

This broad web diffusion of the PraDES survey offers new perspectives to compare assessment practices within and between institutions. More and more actors inside and outside higher education institutions are preoccupied with this issue. In this paper, we highlight the potential of PraDES. A few examples of ongoing treatments show the extent to which docimological practices can be diverse within an institution, for example when we compare different faculties. Differences between institutions can also be noticed, for example when we compare a large institution like the University of Montréal with average and small universities of the French-speaking community of Belgium.

Through these research notes on the PraDES survey, we are launching a call for collaboration and inviting colleagues and institutions of higher learning to contact us so we can share, for the benefit of all, what has already been developed.

Notes on contributors

Jean-Luc Gilles is currently professor at the Haute Ecole Pédagogique Lausanne (HEPL) in Switzerland and heads the R&D unit and the National and International Relations unit. He was initially a primary school teacher and trainer for unemployed people in Belgium. He holds an MSc in psycho-pedagogical sciences from the University of Mons (1992) and a PhD in educational sciences from the University of Liège (2002). He undertook postdoctoral studies (2005) at the Center of Higher Education Didactics and at the University Training Center for Secondary School Teachers at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Currently, he participates in the joint Master of Arts in Social Sciences with the University of Lausanne entitled 'Sciences and Practices in Education'. His primary research interests are the engineering of assessment processes and quality approaches in learning and assessment practices. He heads and participates in the development of several communities encouraging exchanges between practitioners, experts and researchers in education and training. Jean-Luc Gilles is also a founder and the chairman of the board of the spin off Assess-Group, a company specialising in measurements and assessment services (www.assess-group.be).

Pascal Detroz is currently the director of the Système Méthodologique d'Aide à la Réalisation de Tests (SMART) at Université de Liège in Belgium. His primary research interests are the student evaluation of teacher effectiveness and assessment in higher education. In this context the SMART develops and leads an open source community on an ICT assessment management system known as ExAMS (www.exams.be).

Jean-Guy Blais is currently a professor at the Faculty of Education of the Université de Montréal and a recognized researcher in the field of assessment and evaluation in education. He holds an MSc in statistics (1978) and a PhD in measurement and evaluation from the Université de Montréal (1987) and undertook postdoctoral studies (1988) at the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey. His primary research interests are measurement models (IRT and Rasch), data validity and assessment in education using information and communication technology. He currently heads a group of researchers from different universities in Quebec who are studying problems related to the use of ICT for assessing students' knowledge and competencies in many different domains: written French, reading, mathematics, sciences and technology, health education (<http://www.griemetic.ca>).

References

- AMUE. 2001. L'organisation et la préparation des examens: Que faites vous? Agence de modernisation des universités: Publications Vie de l'étudiant, Compte-rendu de la Rencontre du 6 février 2001 [The organization and preparation of examinations: What are you doing? Universities modernisation agency: Publications Student life, Proceedings of the meeting of February 6, 2001] (38 pages PDF).
- Astin, A.W. 1993. *Assessment for excellence: The philosophy and practice of assessment and evaluation in higher education*. Phoenix, AZ: American Council on Education Series on Higher Education/Oryx Press.
- Banta, T.W. & Associates, eds. 2002. *Building a scholarship of assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Banta, T.W., J.P. Lund, K.E. Black, and F.W. Oblander. 1996. *Assessment in practice: Putting principles to work on college campuses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Blais, J.-G. 2008. L'évaluation des apprentissages à l'ordre universitaire: Mise en perspective et rappel de certains résultats de l'enquête de 1997 du Groupe de Recherche Interuniversitaire sur la Pédagogie Universitaire (GRIPU). In *Actes du 15ème congrès de l'Association Mondiale des Sciences de l'Éducation (AMSE) 'Mondialisation et éducation: Vers une société de la connaissance'* [Learning assessments at the university: A perspective and recall of some results of the 1997 Survey of the Interdisciplinary Research Group on University Teaching (GRIPU)]. In Proceedings of the 15th Congress of the World Association for Educational Research (WAER) 'Globalization and Education: Towards a knowledge society', ed. F. Chafiqi et al., 165–6. Marrakech: Cadi Ayyad University.
- Blais, J.-G., C. Gervais, M. Laurier, M. Lévesque, G. Pelletier, and J.-M. Van der Maren. 1997. *L'évaluation des apprentissages à l'Université de Montréal et dans ses écoles*

- affiliées: Une enquête sur les pratiques et les perceptions selon des professeurs et quelques étudiants*. Rapport de recherche du Groupe de recherche interdisciplinaire en pédagogie universitaire (GRIPU) [Learning assessments at the University of Montreal and its affiliated schools: A survey of the practices and perceptions of teachers and some students. Research Report of the Interdisciplinary Research Group on University Teaching (GRIPU)], 175 pages.
- Dupont, P., and M. Ossandon. 1994. *La pédagogie universitaire* [University teaching]. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Gilles, J.-L. 2005. Development of edumetrical indices for the analysis of the spectral quality of higher education standardized tests. Paper presented at the 11th Biennial Conference of the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction – Multiple Perspectives on Effective Learning Environments, August 23–27, in University of Cyprus, Nicosia.
- Gilles, J.-L., and P. Detroz. 2008. L'enquête internationale PraDES au sein de l'Université de Liège: Premières leçons et impact sur le soutien aux enseignants. In *Actes du 15ème congrès de l'Association Mondiale des Sciences de l'Éducation (AMSE) 'Mondialisation et éducation: Vers une société de la connaissance'* [The international survey PraDES within the University of Liège: First lessons and impact on teacher support. In Proceedings of the 15th Congress of the World Association for Educational Research (WAER) 'Globalization and Education: Towards a knowledge society'], ed. F. Chafiqi et al., 167–9. Marrakech: Cadi Ayyad University.
- Kauffman, Ch., P. Dupont, and A. Philippart. 1995. *Projet pilote européen pour l'évaluation de la qualité dans l'enseignement supérieur* [European pilot project for evaluating quality in higher education]. Brussels: Ministry of Education, Research and Training.
- Kaufman, R. 1992. The challenge of total quality management in education. *International Journal of Educational Reform* 1, no. 2: 149–65.
- Lim, D. 1999. Quality assurance in higher education in developing countries. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 24, no. 4: 379–90.
- Mentkowski, M., and G. Loacker. 2002. Enacting a collaborative scholarship of assessment. In *Building a scholarship of assessment*, ed. T.W. Banta & Associates, 82–99. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Messick, S.J., ed. 1999. *Assessment in higher education: Issues of access, quality, student development and public policy*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Nightingale, P., and M. O'Neil. 1994. *Achieving quality learning in higher education*. London: Kogan Page.
- PraDES. 2008. www.smart.ulg.ac.be/prades
- Ramsden, P. 1991. A performance indicator of teaching quality in higher education: The course experience questionnaire. *Studies in Higher Education* 16: 129–50.
- Romainville, M. 2006. Quand la coutume tient lieu de compétence: Les pratiques d'évaluation des acquis à l'université. In *La pratique enseignante en mutation à l'université* [When the custom takes the place of competency: The assessment practices at the university. In The changing teaching practice at university], ed. N. Rege Colet and M. Romainville, 20–1. Brussels: De Boeck.
- Rust, C. 2007. Towards a scholarship of assessment. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 32, no. 2: 229–37.
- Segers, M., and F. Dochy. 1996. Quality assurance in higher education: Theoretical considerations and empirical evidences. *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 22, no. 2: 115–37.
- Segers, M., F. Dochy, and E. Cascallar. 2003. *Optimising new modes of assessment: In search of qualities and standards*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic.
- Stefani, L.A.J. 2004–2005. Assessment of student learning: Promoting a scholarly approach. *Learning & Teaching in Higher Education* 1: 51–66.
- Warren Piper, D. 1994. *Are professors professional? The organisation of university examinations*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Zink, K.J., and A. Schmidt. 1995. Measuring universities against the European quality award criteria. *Total Quality Management* 6, nos. 5–6: 547–61.