Individual and Small Groups Assessment – an instructional and evaluative strategy

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Introduction: Assessment is a curricular component that branches out and reaches virtually every aspect of a course. Over time, assessments seem to have lost their wide response characteristics, becoming restricted to measure the amount of knowledge retained by the students. Faced with the scenario of clear expansion of knowledge, it is widely recommended to develop more instructional methods of evaluation, emphasizing the development of skills such as problem solving and critical argumentation. Objective: This study aimed to verify if the use of small groups’ assessment constitute an instrument of instruction as well as of evaluation, which would help the students to learn more solidly and efficiently. Procedures: Seven written tests were applied during an introductory Biochemistry course, one at each end of a module. Students first answer the test individually and then answer the same test in small groups (4-5 students), giving one response per group. Results were treated by Mixed Methods Analysis. Qualitative data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews; quantitative data were obtained analyzing individual and groups tests performances. Results and discussion: 72.2% of the students (n = 75-159) consider the double assessment procedure an instructional process; 63.7% believe there are benefits with the use of these assessments for Biochemistry learning. Comparing individual and group performances, 71.8% of students who had low individual performance benefit from group assessment. This result gets clear when we consider the student’s average performance in the individual and group assessments: 94.1% of the students improve their grades. In other words, on average the group’s grade is higher than any individual’s grade. Additionally, the questionnaires patterns were confirmed by the interviews analysis. Conclusion: The overall results show that the groups’ assessments can be considered as a good instructional feature, increasing the student’s performance and improving their abilities in problem solving and critical argumentation.

Keywords: active learning, evaluation assessment, mixed methods approach.
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