

Expert pool: Assessment

Confidence-based marking

Wednesday 22 June: 09.00 - 10.30 (CEST)

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Abstract

Confidence-based marking (CBM) is an assessment method which asks the student not only to provide the answer to a question, but also to report their level of confidence (or certainty) in the correctness of their answer. They need to consider this carefully because it affects the marks they are awarded: a student scores full marks for knowing that they know the correct answer, some credit for a tentative correct answer but are penalised if they believe they know the answer but get it wrong. There are several motivations for using CBM: it rewards care and effort so engendering greater engagement, it encourages reflective learning, and it promises accuracy and reliability.

CBM has had niche success in the past in the context of medical training and recently may have found a new niche in the context of regulatory compliance; these are both areas where assessment of competency and mastery is expected. However, CBM has not been widely adopted in other areas of education.

In this talk I will review the CBM landscape and ask why CBM is not used more widely. What are the benefits claimed and how robust is the evidence? How should CBM be presented to the students? Do they need training to understand how the system works? Is it a fair method of assessment? Does it disadvantage any category of student? How does it fit with ideas around 'assessment for learning' and 'reflective learning'?

Confidence-based marking could offer both the student and teacher greater insight into a student's understanding than the standard fare of e-assessment, the multiple-choice quiz. It is a technique that we should therefore keep under consideration.