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**Making the case for democratic assessment practices within a  
critical pedagogy of Physical Education Teacher Education**

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## 1 **Abstract**

2 There has been growing interest in alternative assessment strategies that focus on student  
3 participation within Higher Education over the past twenty years. At the same time, it is  
4 important to note that there is very little published research dealing with alternative forms of  
5 assessment in the field of Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). In this paper we seek  
6 to make a case for democratic assessment practices within a critical pedagogy of PETE. We  
7 begin by outlining developments in assessment in higher education in general, before  
8 considering student participation in assessment processes. We then consider some strategies of  
9 participative assessment, and discuss their benefits, risks and difficulties. An account of the  
10 experience of the National Network of Formative and Shared Assessment in Higher Education  
11 in Spain provides us with a working example of the implementation of democratic practices in  
12 assessment in PETE. We conclude that the lack of research in physical education on democratic  
13 assessment practices raises serious questions about the extent to which our field is committed to  
14 producing teachers capable of meeting the complex social and cultural challenges they will  
15 surely meet in the schools of tomorrow.

## 16 **Keywords**

17 Democratic assessment, critical pedagogy, Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE), self-  
18 assessment, peer-assessment, co-assessment, Higher Education

19

## 1 **Introduction**

2 In the last twenty years, international journals have published an increasing number of  
3 studies on self and peer assessment which show a growing interest in assessment  
4 strategies that focus on student participation. Much of this research is concerned with  
5 alternative, student-centred and democratic forms of assessment as well as the benefits  
6 and educational values of these practices (e.g. Adams & King, 1995; Boud, 1989; Boud,  
7 Cohen et al., 1999); Davies, 2003; Dochy, Seguers et al.,1999); Evans, Mc Kenna et al.,  
8 2005; Fitzpatrick, 2006; Hanrahan & Geoff, 2001; Hinett & Weeden, 2000; Ibabe &  
9 Jauregizar, 2010; Ibarra, Rodríguez & Gómez, 2012; Kirby, & Downs, 2007; López-  
10 Pastor, 2008; López-Pastor, Castejón, Sicilia-Camacho, Navarro-Adelantado & Webb,  
11 2011; Orsmond, Merry et al., 1997; Taras, 2008; Thompson, Pilgrim, et al., 2005;  
12 Williams, 1992). At the same time, some studies point out difficulties in implementing  
13 these strategies, with some even questioning that they are necessarily a positive thing  
14 (Beackley, 2000). Other studies have raised concerns about power relationships inherent  
15 in assessment practices (Fernández-Balboa, 2005), and some have sought to confront  
16 the risks to traditional hierarchies of power in higher education when authentic student  
17 learning is the major goal (Tan, 2008, 2009; Taras, 2010).

18 We think there are several reasons for this increasing interest. First, the work of  
19 authors such as Freire, McLaren, Giroux and Apple, for instance, has promoted a  
20 program of critical pedagogy that endorses the pursuit of justice and equity through

1 education based on the social democratic values necessary for living in a plural and free  
2 society. Second, in the UK, the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education  
3 (the Dearing Report) published in 1997, sought to outline the key requirements for UK  
4 Higher Education for a twenty year period. Third, many of these proposals for  
5 alternative forms of assessment appear at a moment of educational reform in the  
6 European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Each of these developments share one  
7 feature: a search for alternative forms of teaching and learning which focus on students  
8 rather than teachers and where teachers not only pass on knowledge but facilitate the  
9 learning process. There are direct consequences in these developments for assessment  
10 methods. At the very least, students' participation in assessment is required, suggesting  
11 a more democratic process involving students taking responsibility for their own  
12 learning and thus beginning to develop skills for lifelong learning in the rapidly and  
13 continuously changing world of work.

14 In this context, it is important to note that there are very few papers dealing with  
15 alternative forms of assessment in the field of Physical Education Teacher Education  
16 (PETE) either in the Anglophone or Hispanic literatures. Nonetheless, over the last  
17 seven years there has been a growing interest in alternative forms of assessment in  
18 Spain, probably due to new guidelines from EHEA for Spanish universities and the  
19 boost provided by the Network of Formative and Shared Assessment in Higher  
20 Education in Spain (Buscà et al. 2011). This Network, created in 2005, comprises more

1 than 60 teacher-researchers from different Spanish universities who use action-research  
2 as a common methodology for investigating formative and shared assessment in their  
3 own practice and sharing their work with colleagues engaged in similar projects (López-  
4 Pastor, Martínez-Muñoz & Julián-Clemente, 2007; López-Pastor et al., 2011).

5         The purpose of this paper is to review the current situation of assessment, with a  
6 particular focus on Europe, and to make a case for democratic assessment practices  
7 within a critical pedagogy of PETE. We believe that the development of democratic  
8 assessment practices rests, in the first place, on effective pedagogy. Effective pedagogy  
9 consists in teachers facilitating the learning of their students towards particular learning  
10 outcomes consistent with specific bodies of knowledge. There is then a constructive  
11 alignment between ‘good’ teaching and ‘good’ learning. But while so much of the  
12 literature on alternative assessment practices sees effective pedagogy as an end point,  
13 we want to argue here that it is a means to a further end, which is to assist teachers and  
14 students to engage in a dialogic practice. Such dialogic activity, we will argue,  
15 addresses front and centre issues of power and hierarchy that constitute traditional  
16 assessment in higher education generally and in PETE in particular, and facilitates a  
17 form of critical pedagogy essential to democratic practices.

18         We begin by outlining developments in assessment in higher education in  
19 general, before considering student participation in assessment processes. We then  
20 consider some strategies of participative assessment, and discuss their benefits, risks

1 and difficulties. An account of the experience of the National Network of Formative and  
2 Shared Assessment in Higher Education in Spain provides us with a working example  
3 of the implementation of democratic practices in assessment in PETE. We conclude  
4 with a consideration of implications of these developments in democratic assessment  
5 and critical pedagogy for professional development, research and practice.

6

## 7 **Assessment in Higher Education**

8 The Sorbonne (1998) and Bologna (1999) agreements and the European Credits  
9 Transfer System (ECTS) started a converging process towards EHEA which was the  
10 first step for reaching common ground on Higher Education criteria around universities  
11 across Europe. Earlier agreements had focused on developing a system which could  
12 allow students, academic and administrative staff to move freely across European  
13 territory as well as transfer theoretical and practical knowledge and methodologies, thus  
14 promoting professional equal opportunities. Later agreements (Prague, 2001; Barcelona,  
15 2002; Berlin 2003; Bergen, 2005) and the European Standards and Guidelines for  
16 quality assurance (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Ministerial Conference, 2009) focused on  
17 developing pedagogical guidelines to unify criteria for university learning-teaching  
18 processes.

19 Behind all of this work towards the creation of common ground across European  
20 universities was a notion that changes had to take place in terms of the ways in which

1 teaching, learning and assessment are understood, organised and carried out. A clear  
2 implication was that student-orientated pedagogical models should prevail and,  
3 consequently, a consistent approach be taken to assessment using strategies such as self-  
4 assessment, peer assessment and co-assessment.

5         However, the consequences of these European Higher Education initiatives for  
6 student-based strategies do not belong to the last decade only. As we already noted,  
7 advocates for critical pedagogy in the 1980s and 1990s promoted education as a means  
8 of emancipation, of setting people free to become social change agents. To work  
9 towards emancipation, students must be at the core of the educational process through  
10 teaching based on dialogic learning, equal relationships, and democratic practice.  
11 Teaching in this context means having respect for students' knowledge and autonomy.  
12 It means the teacher being a good listener and leading by example (Freire, 1998). In this  
13 context, teachers must create relevant content for students so that they participate in and  
14 create a problematic and critical experience (Giroux, 1988). Knowledge is co-  
15 constructed by teachers and students, not merely given to students by teachers. There is  
16 a clear goal of change within a critical pedagogy perspective, and so it is essential to  
17 create opportunities in the classroom to develop critical thinking in which students  
18 develop the skills required for participation in democratic processes (McLaren, 1994).  
19 We can see that critical pedagogy goes beyond mere participation in teaching and  
20 assessment processes. Instead, it promotes a democratic process through thinking about



1 equity and social justice, questioning power structures in the classroom which  
2 reproduce hegemonic relations in society, and seeking social change.

3         At the same time, some researchers had been working on alternative forms of  
4 assessment before European guidelines on teaching and learning in Higher Education  
5 were established. For instance, in the early 1990s Boud denounced university  
6 assessment methods because they had no consistency with academic values, goals of  
7 independent and meaningful learning, and developing critical thinking skills (Boud,  
8 1990). According to Boud, to achieve consistency, another teaching model was  
9 required. He proposed a student-focused model acknowledging students' prior  
10 knowledge, using assessment methods such as self-assessment, problem-based and  
11 contextualised, holistic and cooperative learning (Boud, 1993). Assessment had to be  
12 consistent with self-directed learning (Boud, 1992), an idea that the author has  
13 developed more recently, in which he makes some proposals for assessment reform in  
14 Australia in relation to when assessment has most effect. He states that assessment is  
15 more effective when students and teachers become responsible partners in learning and  
16 assessment (Boud and Associates, 2010:2). Moreover, Black and Wiliam's work on  
17 assessment for learning is very close to these ideas. Since 1996, their work provided  
18 guidance for implementing formative assessment and assessment for learning in Britain.  
19 Although there was little criticism of their work initially, more recently there has been a  
20 more thoroughgoing examination of their key ideas and concepts (Taras, 2007, 2009).

1           In the UK, recommendations in the Dearing Report for Britain's higher  
2 educational needs for a twenty year period included developing innovative strategies  
3 emphasising students' autonomy and critical thinking skills. Indeed, we can see the  
4 impact of this report in many universities' strategic plans and in a similar discourse  
5 from Guidelines for Quality Assurance development from the 2009 Leuven/Louvain-la-  
6 Neuve Ministerial Conference, which locates the student at the core of learning-teaching  
7 processes with consequences for assessment strategies.

8           Much of the assessment in Higher Education does not, however, match these  
9 various forms of guidance (Sluijsmans et al. 1998). According to Fallows &  
10 Chandramahan (2001), up until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, assessment was very  
11 much in the hands of university teachers. Moreover, McMahon (1999) claims that HE's  
12 vertical organisational structures require students to seek their teachers' approval when  
13 it comes to assessment, which contradicts the intentions of alternative approaches. He  
14 adds that self-assessment could help to break this tendency towards student compliance  
15 and to promote critical thinking. Although this idea has been widely accepted in Higher  
16 Education (Dearing Report's 1997; Stefani, 1998), recently it has been questioned by  
17 Tan (2004, 2008) who pointed out that the uses of self-assessment to empower students  
18 depends on the way this is understood and applied (Tan, 2008:16). Boud et al. (1999)  
19 add that inappropriate assessment practices can lead to competition among students  
20 which does not promote the team work required in current working environments.

1           According to Clifford (1999) and the Dearing Report, if we want to promote  
2 autonomous learning in universities, teachers need to develop new teaching-learning  
3 concepts, competences and change from a knowledge-expert to a knowledge-facilitator  
4 role. At the same time, students need to develop new learning strategies and move from  
5 a passive to a more active role. The latter role is appropriate for the whole educational  
6 process, including assessment. In this way, “students themselves need to develop the  
7 capacity to make judgements about both their own work and that of others in order to  
8 become effective continuing learners and practitioners” (Boud, 2010:1).

### 10   **Student participation in assessment processes**

11   When we talk about student participation in assessment processes, we are particularly  
12 referring to self-assessment, peer assessment and co-assessment. There has been some  
13 confusion in the literature concerning the notions of peer and co-assessment, which are  
14 sometimes considered in the Hispanic literature to be synonymous (López-Pastor,  
15 2012:121). Peer assessment refers to reciprocal assessment between equals. We  
16 understand co-assessment to refer to “the direct and active involvement of the student(s)  
17 in their own assessment through a process of dialogue (with the teacher) to arrive at an  
18 agreed or collective decision” (López-Pastor et al., 2011:81).

19           Considering student participation in assessment processes can only be achieved  
20 within a student focused pedagogical model which seeks students’ autonomy

1 (Falchikov, 1998), is suitable for employment demands and develops students' skills in  
2 a formative way (Somerwell, 1993). Stefani (1998) states that students must participate  
3 through dialogue, they need to understand assessment criteria and work jointly with the  
4 teacher in order to become autonomous and reflective people. That means we need to  
5 talk about the process of planning through to implementation of educational programs  
6 as a democratic practice; however, this is not always an easy task especially when  
7 considering assessment for marking levels and grades. According to López-Pastor et al.  
8 (2009), for an assessment process to be considered democratic it should have  
9 transparent criteria, information exchange, student participation, negotiation,  
10 communication links, dialogue, respect, equality, justice, shared responsibility, shared  
11 power and meta-assessment (p.31). To achieve democratic and educative assessment in  
12 the classroom means to create a community of shared practice where nothing of the  
13 assessment process is hidden from the students and they can assess their own learning.  
14 According to Elwood and Klenowski (2002), in order to improve teaching and learning,  
15 educative assessment must be formative in its functions and objectives, and it must  
16 place the student at the core of the assessment process.

17 Dochy et al.'s (1999) review of 63 studies of self and peer assessment in HE  
18 shows the necessity of reconsidering the relationship between learning and assessment.  
19 They suggest that combining different assessment strategies, particularly those which  
20 place the student at the core of the process such as self, peer and co-assessment,

1 motivates students to become more reflective and responsible for their learning. On the  
2 other hand, Brew & Riley's study (2009) shows a variety of students' and teachers'  
3 views on participative practices which reveal that self and peer assessment are  
4 negotiated and set within the context of their production, in other words, assessment  
5 practices are a social construction (Gale, Martin & McQueen, 2002). Accordingly, we  
6 can understand that every teacher within her context and with her students will develop  
7 her own paradigm considering different degrees of student participation in assessment  
8 decisions. The degree of student participation may vary from participating in  
9 assessment for learning activities without any influence on final marks (McMahon,  
10 1999) and including participation in the negotiation of assessment criteria (Boud, 1992;  
11 Clifford, 1999; Elwood & Klenowski, 2002; Gale, 2002; Orsmond et al.,2000;;  
12 Stefani,1998 ) to having real power over assessment decisions throughout the process  
13 including their final grades (Alkaslassy, 2011; Boyd and Cowan, 1985; Taras, 2008;  
14 Woods et al., 1988; Walker & Warshurst, 2000). In other words, student participation  
15 may range from very little to total control.

16 To thoroughly engage in these democratic practices we need to find evidence of  
17 their benefits but also to consider risks and identify difficulties in their implementation.  
18 This evidence can then assist us to create the ideal conditions in which democratic  
19 assessment practices could be successful.

20

## 1 **Strategies of democratic assessment: benefits, risks and difficulties**

2 There are links between formative assessment (including participative strategies as self,  
3 peer and co-assessment), and methodologies based on students' participation in  
4 learning-teaching processes and learning improvement (Biggs, 2005; Boud and  
5 Flachikov, 2006; Brown and Glasner, 2003; Dochy, Segers & Dierick, 2002; Fraile,  
6 2004, 2006; Humphreys, 1997; Knight, 2005; López-Pastor et al. 2006, 2009, 2011;  
7 Pekic, 2007). Furthermore, Sluijsmans et al.'s (1998) research on 62 cases provides  
8 evidence of self, peer and co-assessment as effective tools for developing professional  
9 competences and the appropriate use and application of knowledge in a range of work-  
10 related contexts.

11 Additionally, these practices can have significant impact on critical thinking  
12 skills (Fitzpatrick, 2006), since they have the potential to promote a better  
13 understanding of grades and develop empathy when students engage in assessment  
14 together with the teacher. They can also increase motivation (Andrade & Du, 2007;  
15 Hanrahan and Geoff, 2001) and the level of awareness of thinking and learning  
16 processes (Mok, Lung et al., 2006; Thompson, Pilgrim et al. 2005; Walser, 2009).  
17 Results from Orsmond al.'s (2000) work suggest that self-assessment can be extremely  
18 useful for students to achieve their own goals and that it is a very strong educative tool.  
19 Self and peer assessment can help future teachers in different ways, such as  
20 understanding formal assessment requirements by developing and practicing formative

1 comments, boosting learner confidence and motivation for learning, and increasing their  
2 grasp of subject content (Hinett & Weeden, 2000; Kennedy & Allan, 2009; Lorente &  
3 Kirk, 2013).

4         Nevertheless, we must be cautious and not assume that these are positive  
5 practices in and of themselves. For example, Beackley (2000) thinks that self-  
6 assessment has not been critically analysed. Advocates consider self-assessment as a  
7 positive thing without questioning the assumptions underpinning the psychological-  
8 humanistic approach which informs it, for instance, the notion of the transparent nature  
9 of the self. Other critics point to further issues: power and equality in self-assessment,  
10 tensions between formative and summative assessment (Taras, 2008) and empowering  
11 or disciplining students (Tan, 2004). Tan (2008) analyses how teachers understand and  
12 apply assessment and students' ideas about assessment. He believes it is necessary to  
13 identify types of power in those practices and to understand the context in which they  
14 appear (Tan, 2009). Some studies have researched students' perception of these  
15 strategies and have found that students are not always motivated by self and peer  
16 assessment (Brew et al., 2009; Humphreys, Greenan & McIveen, 1997; Lorente & Kirk,  
17 2013) particularly when used for levels or grades (Walker & Warshurst, 2000). Walker  
18 & Warshurst (2000) conclude that self and peer assessment are welcome by students for  
19 formative but not for summative assessment purposes. Amongst the reasons explaining  
20 this lack of enthusiasm for summative assessment, they found students believe they are

1 not able to judge their own work objectively in self- assessment and finding it difficult  
2 to be critical when assessing their peers' work (Lindblom-ylänne, 2006). Hence, it  
3 appears necessary to have certain previous conditions and training to carry out these  
4 practices.

5 Andrade & Du's study (2007) provide some possible means of resolving these  
6 difficulties. They argue, as Sluijmsans, Brand-Gruwel and Van Merriënboer (2002) do  
7 for peer assessment, that students have a better attitude towards self-assessment after  
8 practicing it for a while and that this practice can be more effective when they know  
9 their teachers' expectations. This study also shows tensions between students' and  
10 teachers' expectations of acceptable standards. But merely discussing assessment  
11 criteria is not sufficient to involve students, especially when these discussions concern  
12 students who have limited experience with peer assessment (Prins, Sluijmsans,  
13 Kirschener and Strijbos, 2005). Oldfield et al. (1995) highlight the importance of  
14 students' learning process when assessing others' work and when assessing their own  
15 work later on. Consistent with Andrade and Du, Oldfield et al. agree on the need to  
16 build up confidence through experience and feedback. We would add to this, agreeing  
17 with the results of Prins et al.'s research developed in computer supported collaborative  
18 learning (CSCL) environment, that collaboration skills and social skills are essential for  
19 effective peer assessment (p.436).



1           Also, it would appear to be important to consider how university teachers use  
2 these practices, whether with formative or summative purposes and, moreover, to  
3 consider the purpose of assessment. Some authors such as Lublin (1980) consider these  
4 strategies should only be used as diagnostic feedback so that students can be realistic  
5 about their judgements. At the same time, many studies point out the need for some  
6 training to develop self-assessment skills if we want these strategies to be productive  
7 and beneficial (Adams & King, 1995; Cassidy, 2007; Hanrahan & Geoff, 2001; Pain &  
8 Mowl, 1996; Taras 2001). In this sense, Taras (2001) proposes the following guidelines  
9 to prepare students for self-assessment: a) to use self-assessment as summative  
10 assessment, in other words with grading purposes , b) to receive tutor feedback to  
11 understand mistakes, and c) students should know their grade only after completing  
12 formative self-assessment.

13           Another important aspect to take into account when thinking about self-  
14 assessment is individual student learning styles. Cassidy (2007) relates self-assessment  
15 skills to student learning style and concludes that there is evidence of a tendency of  
16 learners with a superficial learning style to underestimate their achievement while  
17 learners with a more in depth learning style correlate with precision their self-  
18 assessment skills. To be able to handle diversity in the classroom in a positive way, it is  
19 necessary to supervise and to develop this skill; however, there does not seem to be  
20 agreement on this matter. Stefani (1994) argued that most students had a realistic

1 perception about their own skills and that they could make rational judgements on their  
2 peers' achievements.

3         As regards teachers' response to these assessment practices, Brew et al. (2009)  
4 found that many teachers supported peer assessment because of its good use of time  
5 rather than because of its pedagogical values that flow from involving students in their  
6 own assessment processes. They conclude that it is necessary to prepare students for  
7 those practices by showing examples and explaining the reasons for using those  
8 strategies. On the other hand, Fitzpatrick (2006) found that teachers believe  
9 participative assessment takes too long, generates anxiety and requires lengthy  
10 negotiation and cooperation between peers and teachers.

11         Something that concerns those who add these participative strategies to their  
12 teaching practice is correlating grades and comments given by students with their own  
13 grading as a teacher. Lew et al. (2010) say that there is a weak-moderate correlation  
14 between self-assessment ability and self, peer and tutor assessment results. A more  
15 academically competent student can assess themselves with more accuracy than those  
16 considered as less competent, and this accuracy does not increase after practising self-  
17 assessment for four consecutive periods. On the other hand, Sullivan and Hall (1997) in  
18 a similar study show that there is good level of agreement between students and  
19 teachers' marking; however, there is a tendency of students to overestimate in their  
20 marking. After several interviews these authors could confirm that those who have

1 overestimated their grades did not have a clear idea about the marking criteria and they  
2 wanted a more specific guideline from the teacher. Giving clear success criteria tends to  
3 improve self-assessment practice.

4         This point has been noted recently by Sadler (2010). According to Sadler, the  
5 task is not to train students to use preset criteria, criteria sheets and rubrics. This, he  
6 argues, does not necessarily prepare them for lifelong learning. Seeking a rubric for the  
7 assessment of each and every situation graduates are likely to encounter in their lives  
8 beyond university is, for Sadler, unrealistic (p.547). He suggests it is better to assess the  
9 work as a whole, identifying deficiencies and weakness, since the use of preset criteria  
10 will not necessarily assist students to make the best or most appropriate judgements.

11         Once again we may note how difficult it is to compare studies on the use of  
12 participative strategies since the idea that teachers and students have of these strategies  
13 is a crucial element as well as the way they experience them. Nevertheless we could  
14 suggest some ways of tackling these issues. For instance, Falchikov and Boud (1989)  
15 analysed studies on self-assessment which compared self-assessment marking with  
16 teacher marking and found that in order to increase consistency it was important to  
17 consider the quality of the study's design (a better design provided more agreements on  
18 marking), course level (a higher level provided a more accurate self-assessment) and the  
19 subject area (scientific subjects show more accurate results). For this reason it is very

1 important to have a good design and an accurate report of the research. Similar results  
2 rise from peer-assessment experiences (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000).

3       Finally and with regard to participative strategies with summative purposes  
4 (grading), there have been several studies in which students had been involved in  
5 producing their own marking criteria. Orsmond, Merry and Reiling's study (2000)  
6 provided evidence of students being unable to discriminate between marking criteria  
7 they themselves produced and those produced by the teacher. Furthermore, the fact of  
8 creating their own criteria through a dialogue with the teacher did not necessarily  
9 facilitate agreement. Indeed, producing their own criteria seemed to lead to other forms  
10 of learning compared to those obtained from pre-established criteria. Other research on  
11 this issue concludes that this practice is not totally transparent and does not easily reveal  
12 general characteristics. Consequently, it is necessary to have training and practice and to  
13 create an adequate environment promoting honesty and personal responsibility.

14

### 15 **Democratic assessment practices in PETE. The experience of the** 16 **National Network of Formative and Shared Assessment in Higher** 17 **Education (Spain)**

18 After an exhaustive review we found very little research in the English language  
19 literature that makes explicit reference to the participation of students in the processes  
20 of assessment in the field of the Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). Sport

1 Discus showed no references on this theme in PETE programmes. The key words in our  
2 search criteria were ‘self-assessment+PETE’, and ‘peer assessment + PETE’. In a  
3 general search of EBSCO Education search elite looking for ‘self-assessment+HE’ we  
4 found 165 references but only 71 of relevance to peer assessment and co-assessment. In  
5 the same database we only found three publications with the search of ‘self-  
6 assessment+PETE’. The searches in both cases were for papers and other outputs  
7 published between 1990 and 2013. Nevertheless there are some papers relevant to the  
8 theme of our paper which we have listed in the references section that are not indexed or  
9 do not appear in the databases.

10 While there is a similar dearth of publications in the Spanish context,  
11 nevertheless there has been an increase of the publications on alternative approaches to  
12 assessment in recent years (Sicilia-Camacho et al., 2011). Buscà et al. (2011) carried out  
13 a study on articles published in Spanish between 1999 and 2009 on formative  
14 assessment and concluded that only 32 of 165 articles correspond to university level and  
15 the majority are accounts of professional experience and are not research articles. At the  
16 same time, Buscà et al. (2011) are unable to establish the exact number of publications  
17 that are directly related to formative and alternative assessment practices in PETE,  
18 despite the fact that there are other indicators of the increase in its use in universities.

19 From our point of view, there are two possible reasons for this increase in  
20 publications and other evidence of alternative assessment practices in Spain. The first is

1 the development and implementation of the guidelines of the EHEA in Spanish  
2 universities. And the second is the creation in 2005 of the Network of Shared and  
3 Formative Assessment in Higher Education, led by Victor López-Pastor at the  
4 University of Valladolid (López-Pastor et al. 2011). The Network currently consists of  
5 68 researchers belonging to 20 universities, 24 faculties, and 14 areas of knowledge  
6 (mainly in PETE with 32 HE teachers) carrying out research on their teaching practice  
7 using formative and participative assessment strategies. Factors motivating its members  
8 to join the Network include an interest in improving their own assessment practices in  
9 relation to the demands of the EHEA, taking opportunities to update and revise their  
10 own teaching, taking opportunities to combine teaching with research, and the chance to  
11 share knowledge on this subject.

12         The teacher-researchers involved in this Network set out to test two educational  
13 paradigms to integrate two positions: a pragmatic paradigm, based on recognition that  
14 there are benefits of participatory and contextualized assessment; and the other a critical  
15 paradigm based on the change of the model of assessment, rooted in democratic  
16 practices and with strong ethical requirements. Informed by this value position, the  
17 members of the Network facilitate collaborative work that starts with individual case  
18 studies to become, after sharing and discussing the information, collective case studies  
19 investigating successive cycles of action research (Manrique, Vallés & Gea, 2012;  
20 Pérez-Pueyo et al. 2008). Currently in Spain this Network is carrying out a research

1 project<sup>1</sup> funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation to map the current situation  
2 regarding assessment in PETE programmes within and beyond the Network with the  
3 main objective to design, implement and evaluate an intervention for formative  
4 assessment in Higher Education. The study focuses not only study on formative  
5 assessment but on the students' participation in the processes of assessment through  
6 self-assessment, peer-assessment and co-assessment. The project involves 17  
7 universities and 35 researchers. Data from the first phase has been generated through  
8 1129 questionnaires and eight student discussion groups; 217 questionnaires and eight  
9 discussion groups to learn about teachers' perspectives; and 228 questionnaires and six  
10 discussion groups to discover graduates' views. The first results of the diagnosis phase  
11 were reported to the VI International conference of Formative and Shared Assessment  
12 in 2011 held at the University of Zaragoza (Spain). Some of the main findings of this  
13 report were that teachers lack training in the use of participative strategies on  
14 assessment. There are thus some inconsistencies in action when they implemented such  
15 practices in relation to what the literature has advocated. In addition, self-grading and  
16 co-grading have so far been relatively little used. These early results seem to indicate  
17 that alternative assessment strategies involving students are not widely used and totally  
18 match with other research recently conducted in Spain in the field of Higher Education  
19 (Rodríguez-Gómez et al. 2012). A next step is to find out why this is the case and to

1 learn about the difficulties facing the Higher Education teachers as they seek to apply  
2 these strategies.

3         The report of the second phase of this project presented to the VII National  
4 Conference of Formative Assessment in Higher Education held at the University of Vic  
5 (Spain) in 2012 indicated that generally teachers use self-assessment and self-grading  
6 but very few use peer-grading. According to them there is a variety of reasons for this:  
7 a) students' insecurity and fear to assess their classmates, b) difficulty of accepting  
8 criticism from peers, c) difficulty of transforming the information obtained in the peer  
9 assessment in grading and d) inflexible university systems. On the other hand, teacher-  
10 researchers involved in the study reported that to improve the use of these strategies is  
11 necessary: a) to facilitate tools for doing both self and peer assessment, b) to generate a  
12 climate of trust in the classroom, c) to end the process with a co-assessment, d) to use  
13 this strategy in some subjects that have few students or in placement practices and e) to  
14 negotiate the assessment criteria between teacher and students at the beginning of the  
15 unit.

16         This is the first time the Spanish government has financed a large-scale research  
17 project in this theme, with the project due for completion by 2013. A number of  
18 publications (books and papers) are planned that will provide case studies of the  
19 experience of working through networks in Higher Education and concretely about the



1 case in which we are especially interested, the use of alternative assessment practices in  
2 Higher Education.

3

#### 4 **Conclusion**

5 Our purpose in this paper has been to review the current situation of assessment, and to  
6 make a case for democratic assessment practices within a critical pedagogy of PETE.  
7 Proposing democratic assessment that seeks to promote the participation of students in  
8 the assessment process has implications in a number of contexts, for professional  
9 development, for research and for practice. Despite the difficulty of discriminating  
10 between these contexts, we conclude with a brief discussion of these implications based  
11 on the experience of one of the authors as a member of the Network.

12 From the point of view of a member of the National Network, research about  
13 one's own practice has a clear and direct impact on personal professional development,  
14 which encourages continuous and critical reflection on all aspects of education. In this  
15 particular case, an issue that always produces doubts and uncertainties in both teachers  
16 and students is the students' participation in grading processes. As other studies have  
17 shown, sometimes the main reluctance comes from students rather than the teacher.  
18 Although there are some strategies we mentioned earlier that may assist us to overcome  
19 such difficulties, we think is also appropriate to look to other professional fields for  
20 answers. It is for that reason that the potential for professional development is even

1 greater if this work can be shared through networks involving various higher education  
2 professionals interested in this topic. It is necessary to create communities of learning  
3 spaces where the results of our own personal professional experiences can be shared  
4 with other professionals involved in similar work. We believe this should be an ongoing  
5 and sustained process that transcends disciplinary and national borders, sharing with  
6 professionals from other countries and contexts with the intention to move forward our  
7 understanding of democratic assessment.

8       After noting the scarcity of studies on this theme in PETE we can say with some  
9 conviction that we need more case studies and more action research on democratic  
10 practices on assessment to reaffirm, refute or challenge currently dominant practices.  
11 Only with a critical view of these practices we can have some force to promote the use  
12 of democratic assessment. But this research must be coordinated, so that there are some  
13 commonalities that all professionals can learn from. An example of this is the work  
14 developed by the Network in Spain, which, year after year, is defining new cycles of  
15 action research developed by its members.

16       There are also implications for practice of our advocacy of democratic  
17 assessment that can be seen from two perspectives. The first is the perspective of the  
18 teachers involved in these practices, who find out for themselves the benefits,  
19 difficulties and the risks of democratic assessment. They learn firsthand what type of  
20 power relationships are generated in the classroom, as well as the students' expectations

1 and reactions to these alternative practices. In our view, this firsthand experience  
2 provides encouragement to continue working and developing these types of strategies.  
3 But above all it is only through this personal experience that teacher-researchers come  
4 to understand, in an embodied sense, the kinds of changing relationships between  
5 curriculum, teaching and learning that democratic forms of assessment requires. The  
6 second is the perspective of student teachers and future physical educators who also  
7 experience for themselves democratic practices. Several studies and our own experience  
8 shows that these future teachers feel more secure when implementing these strategies in  
9 their own practice after having experienced them firsthand, and after seeing for  
10 themselves the consistency between, discourse and action (Hinett & Weeden, 2000).

11 We suggest that the discourse of critical pedagogy is little more than empty  
12 rhetoric without serious attention to assessment practices in PETE and in Higher  
13 Education more generally. This is because assessment lies at the heart of educational  
14 practice. It is the pedagogical space in which relations of power are most clearly visible  
15 since it is through assessment that particular kinds of knowledge are recognised and  
16 valued. We think that the lack of research in physical education on democratic  
17 assessment practices raises serious questions about the extent to which our field is  
18 committed to producing teachers capable of meeting the complex social and cultural  
19 challenges they will surely meet in the schools of tomorrow.

20

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4

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9

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