EXPERIMENTATION WITH ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES: A PROPOSAL FOR PANEL DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

Experimentation in student assessment is just as critical as it is in teaching pedagogy. Actually the two are closely intertwined. Assessment is a critical part of the teaching process. The purpose of the proposed panel discussion is to share creative practices in the assessment process.

Guay (1997) believes, "how you assess determines how you teach." In recent years there has been a great deal of discussion in education literature about the need to re-think how we teach and how we assess our students (Thrust for Educational Leadership, V. 26, February/March 1997). Much is being written on the assessment reform (Walberg, H.J., 1994; Kane, M.B.; Khattri, N. 1995.) The purpose of the proposed panel discussion is to share creative practices in the assessment process. Experimentation and creativity in assessment has the potential to drastically reform the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom (Kerrins, 1997).

The panel consists of five members. Each member will give a brief presentation. Listed below is a brief description of what each member is expected to share. There will be at least a 20-minute question and answer session with the audience. The remaining session will be used to mine innovative assessment practices from the audience. The session is planned to be interactive and primarily discussion based.

1. Sandra Morgan - University of Hartford

ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

I use the standard AAHE definition of assessment as a "systematic collection, review and use of information to improve student learning and development" and I try to assess students by both understanding what they learned and didn't learn. Most of my assessment is embedded in assignments, both written and action-oriented in the classroom (e.g., presentations, group activities). Of course, I also use tests—students seem comfortable with them, and some of my undergraduates probably would never read the text if there weren't tests scheduled. Two standard tools I use are Reflection Papers and Fast Feedback.

REFLECTION PAPERS

These are short (1-2 pages) papers required either weekly or every other week from undergraduates. The assignment is spelled out in general on the syllabus and I post (on the blackboard) and hand out the topic a week before the due date. In a class that meets twice a week, I make the paper due the first class of the week. The objective of a reflection paper is for the student to integrate theory and practice, to see how concepts from the course readings and class activity relate to his or her own experience. I ask a specific question for students to respond to although the idea of the RP has evolved from what I used to call "journal notes," which were more free form. I found that with undergrads, the more specific I am, the better the learning.

Two examples of RP questions in a leadership/problem-solving and decision-making course appear below:

"Write a description (story) of a time when you had to make a major decision. Include all the story components—setting, characters, "plot" or processes used, action, results, and what you learned from this experience that will affect (or has already affected) your future behavior."

"In RP 4 you wrote about a major decision. In this reflection paper, you will view the decision in a different way. Analyze your process of framing and making the decision using the four elements on pages 2-3 of your text [framing, gathering intelligence, coming to conclusions, learning from feedback]. Ideally, you would name the element, (e.g., framing), then present your way of framing the decision and then give concrete support to your statement using the components of framing from page 2 (e.g., tell what your viewpoint was, list your primary criteria that would help you choose one option over the other, etc.). At the end of presenting the four elements with support from your actual decision, write about your reflection now—was it a well-managed decision based on these elements? If not, how could it have been improved?"

In reading and grading (i.e., assessing) these reflection papers, I can see whether students have absorbed the conceptual material and are able to apply it in their own lives. I grade on both content and presentation, thus encouraging students to write clearly and professionally. I find that most improve measurably about half way through the semester and the few who continue to struggle I require to get tutoring from our Learning Center to improve the mechanics of writing.

I usually allot 30-40% of the grade to the reflection papers in an undergraduate class. I like this method much better than requiring a research paper, which they could download from the internet!

FAST FEEDBACK

I use the following questions in about 3-4 classes in each course every semester; I print them out on an 8 1/2 x 11" piece paper and hand it out 10 minutes before the class is over. I ask students to respond honestly and to turn the forms in anonymously. The following class I respond to the comments and, as a class, we try to improve the process and content for the remainder of the term. This is both an assessment of student learning and satisfaction as well as an assessment of my design and presentation of the material.

Fast Feedback
[Course number]
1 Of what you learned today, what did you find most interesting and/or useful?
(I leave plenty of space between questions for their responses.)
2 What points need more clarity?
3 What did you like/dislike about the class process?
4 What single change could have improved today's session the most?
5 What can we (you and I) do to help you get more out of this course?
6 Overall, how would you rate today's class? (Circle a number.)

Terrible	Not very good	Okay	Good	Great
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

The responses help me determine how much the students have absorbed of the content and also figure out better ways to design the class for more learning. The forms and my response to them in the following class also model acceptance of and use of feedback, a skill we hope to inculcate in our graduates.

2. Joshua Mott – Student, Ashland University

The College of Business & Economics at Ashland University implemented competency-based curricula six years ago. This has resulted in programmatic assessment of competencies in areas such as written and verbal communication as well as course-wide experimentation by individual professors. The purpose of my presentation will be to share the course-wide experimentation. I will review all the course syllabi in the College of Business & Economics; identify the non-traditional/innovative practices listed on these syllabi and then interview those individual professors to learn the details and specifics of those non-traditional assessment techniques listed on their syllabi. As a member of this panel, I will share the results of this qualitative survey with the audience.

3. Diana Page – University of West Florida

FINAL EXAMS AND CONCEPT TESTING

I will address two successful experiments with assessments in an Organizational Behavior (OB) Class. The first assessment technique concerns a final exam. This assessment was designed to determine individual student, comprehensive knowledge of OB. The instructions are quite simple, and allow students maximum flexibility and creativity in demonstrating their knowledge of OB. Students say this is the most enjoyable final exam they have ever completed.

The second experimental assessment technique offers a model to determine individual application of specific concepts and readings also in an OB course. For this assessment, students are exposed to the relevant theory, they apply the theory to the classroom experience and/or their group, and finally, students describe the implications for them in the future. This technique begins with and goes beyond Kolb's (1984) journal suggestions.

Suggestions for substitutability are offered for classes other than OB. Samples of both assessments will be provided to

participants.   In addition, guidelines for evaluating both assessment techniques are offered.

4. Khush Pittenger – Ashland University

As the Chairperson of the panel, I plan to serve as the moderator for the discussion. In addition, if time permits, I will share two experiments I am currently conducting in my Introduction to Management class. Both experiments are meant to encourage learning of the course content in an interactive, creative and fun manner. One involves a group project while the other is a class competition about the nature of the final exam.

5. Constance Savage – Ashland University

After some experimentation, I have developed a working model for assessing student participation. This model clearly delineates faculty expectations for student participation in class and provides a process for promoting on-target class participation. I will share with the audience participation guidelines that outline the factors of class participation, their definitions and examples. In addition, I will share the mechanisms that I use for students to self-assess their class participation. I use tangible reinforcements early in the semester to encourage class participation. I use participation contracts to engage silent students. Kolb's (1999) Learning Style Inventory helps me individualize my practices and I provide coaching throughout the semester to shape student behavior. All these techniques will be shared with the audience in as much detail as the time permits. This is definitely work-in-progress. I plan to harvest the audience's wisdom to refine the model further. I expect the dialogue to be engaging and vigorous.

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