

The Assessment Quarterly

Some Resources for Exploring Classroom Assessment

Tom Clemens, HFA

The following are websites which show how faculty at other institutions define and implement classroom assessment. They were found by a website search, using "classroom assessment" for the keyword. For the most part, the methods for classroom assessment are based on the work of Thomas Angelo and Patricia Cross (Have you noticed that she is an alum of ISU and that she endowed a professorship there this year?). Their book Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers (available in HCC's Instructional Development Center) is widely quoted and referenced in these websites.

The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching website at Penn State has a list of the classroom assessment techniques (CATs) found to be the most useful by the Penn State faculty. See <http://www.psu.edu/celt/CATs.html>

The website at Honolulu Community College provides a list of "Quick CATs," i.e. classroom assessment techniques that take only a couple of minutes in class. Angelo and Cross emphasize techniques which are quick to do and quick to read in order to learn how well students are learning at a particular time. The emphasis is on what an instructor can change to help students now. See <http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/assess-2.htm> or <http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/>

[committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/assess-1.htm](http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/assess-1.htm)

A webpage at Southern Illinois University lists seven good practices for undergraduate education, credited to A.W. Chickering and Z.F. Gamson. One of these points calls on the need to respect the ways that students learn. CATs can help in assessing how and how much students are learning. This site also has a Teaching Goals Inventory which can be taken online and used to reflect on one's teaching. See <http://www.siu.edu/~deder/assess/catmain.html>

The webpage at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga lists some assumptions about classroom assessment, which can be used to critically inquire into the rationale of classroom assessment and to explore the ethical dimensions of classroom assessment and teaching. See <http://www.utc.edu/Teaching-Resource-Center/assessment.html#assumptions>

Again, all the sites above are found through a simple search for "classroom assessment" sites. A review of such sites can be used to compare what is already happening at HCC to other colleges. As we learn together about classroom assessment, the Assessment Committee hopes to provide a variety of opportunities for faculty to share their approaches to reflective practice.

Upcoming Assessment Events

AAHE Assessment Conference, Boston

June 20-23, 2002

The theme of this year's national conference is "Assessment: A Shared Commitment." Five theme tracks provide the focus of the conference, which includes preconference workshops, concurrent sessions, poster sessions, and roundtable discussions. For more information: <http://www.aahe.org/assessment/2002/>

Online Assessment Class, Illinois Online Network

The Making the Virtual Classroom a Reality series offers an online assessment class. Registration opened 4/22/02 and the course begins 6/5/02. For more information: <http://www.mvcr.org/>

Student Background Surveys

R. John Muench, Chemistry

Have you ever wondered what abilities or views your students hold? Would that information be useful in how you teach? I certainly believe that this information can be useful. In order to answer many of these questions, I use the Student Background Survey in most of the courses that I teach.

On the first day of CHEM 161, I have students fill out a short survey that is designed to find out a little information about them and their abilities. The questions range from how much high school chemistry they had (and how long ago), to their math background, and to what they perceive as their ability to solve problems. A brief math quiz follows this to determine where each student's current math skills lie. The information gleaned from this helps to establish whether a student is "at-risk" early on in this course. The next class period I discuss some of the collective results with the class and identify several of the common characteristics of an "at-risk" student. I strongly encourage those that fit into the "at-risk" group to either come to the weekly study group or see a

tutor from the very beginning. While I do not have any empirical data that proves this, in my opinion this identification of "at-risk" students helps at least two or three of them to have a successful experience in this course.

I believe that this type of survey could work in just about any course and for a variety of information. For example, a history instructor might survey the students to find out what they know about the Vietnam War. A sociology instructor might try to determine whether his or her students have any hidden biases before discussing stereotypes. A math instructor could give a pre-test on factoring polynomials to see what level of understanding exists. Then, based on the feedback from the class, an instructor can adjust how the material is covered.

Thus, if you are looking for a method to solicit information from your class, try a Student Background Survey.

Assessment: Self-Renovation

Rachel Hills-Newell, English

...society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things around him...
Ralph Waldo Emerson—"New England Reformers"

After three years of teaching literature and composition and assessing student learning in these subjects, I have realized that, regardless of particular techniques, assessment does not work unless the teacher listens to and integrates student feedback into the course plans. This listening and integration requires more than merely looking at student responses to see what is working and what is not, what students have learned and what they have not learned--it requires instructors to give up some control of their course plans and to be willing to alter activities and assignments based on student needs. Though giving up control often causes teachers to feel uneasy, it is a necessary sacrifice for the sake of successful assessment and, more importantly, for successful education.

Through giving up some control, instructors create classroom environments based on mutual trust and decision making. As instructors think critically about assessment results and incorporate those results into their courses, students will realize they have a voice in "planning" their own courses. Once students realize they play a role in the direction of the courses, they are able to work mutually with the teacher in making decisions. This mutual exchange of ideas not only creates an open and honest classroom environment, but also makes assessment useful and worthwhile in the evolution of a course.

Though assessment of student learning is necessary and important to education, assessment of one's self is the only way to put student assessment results to worthwhile use. As Emerson tells us, we cannot 'renovate' our students' learning experiences without 'renovating' the way we teach and the way we view our roles as teachers. Part of our job in assessing, then, is to redefine ourselves as educators

I Tried It... And It Worked!!!

Terry R. Lowe, Business

I put the last issue of "Assessment Quarterly" in my "airplane reading" stack. This is where I put things I really do want to read, but don't have time except while on airplanes.

I came to John Muench's article on the self-assessment activity he has his classes do after exams. It was one of those "right time/right place" things because I had been looking for a way to get honest feedback on exam experiences for a very long time. The first exam in my Introduction To Business classes on Tuesday evening and the Open Learning section was coming soon, so I decided to try something like what John had suggested.

The week after the exam, I told all students that on a one-time basis only, they had a chance to improve their exam grade by 2 percentage points if they completed a self-assessment about the exam experience. The exercise was completely optional.

I decided to ask four questions:

- 1- What was your reaction to your grade? Shocked? Disappointed? Pleasantly surprised? What you expected? Tell me why.
- 2- What turned out to be some of the better preparation techniques you used? Did you use any of the suggestions I made? Why do you think these methods helped?
- 3- What did not work in your preparation and why? Is there a way for you to modify these methods and have them work better next time?
- 4- What are you going to do differently for the next exams in terms of your preparation? Or if you did well, what are you going to continue to do and why?

This will not come as a surprise to anyone: the students who did not really need the points completed the exercise while those who desperately needed the credit did not bother. Lesson one for me! (It reinforced what I thought I already knew about good students.)

Those who completed the evaluation were brutally honest in many cases. I heard comments like "I was foolish not to use better time management techniques...and I will definitely put in more time for the next exams." I also heard many thoughts like this: "You told us the best approaches and I thought you were just trying to get us to over study...but you weren't. I will listen next time!" Finally, this theme emerged frequently: "I am in way over my head with classes, work, and home. I just plain didn't have enough time to study. It's me...not you."

The assessment gave students a chance to vent, earn credit, and hold themselves accountable for future performance. And it provided me with some much needed validation that what I had been telling them to do to be well prepared for exams was not far off the mark.

I do wish more students had participated. I felt my offer of 2 percentage points was generous. But maybe it takes a lot more these days to get students to do some extra soul searching. Maybe someone can write about that for all of us. (Hint, Hint)

Thanks to John for sharing. I will be making this exercise a permanent feature in all courses I teach. I am betting I will continue to gain valuable insights into how students are approaching testing and I know I will be a better instructor for that.

The Minute Paper as a Valuable Student Feedback Tool

Stephanie Kratz, English

This semester, the use of a Classroom Assessment Technique offered me feedback on student understanding. In English 102, the second in the series of required composition courses, students prepare to write lengthier and more detailed persuasive essays. Therefore, it is important for them to understand how an argument works. So during a class lecture, I introduced the parts of an argument (claim, reasons, link, qualifier, and challenges). I defined the parts, gave examples, and asked students to identify the parts in a sample argumentative essay.

While analysis of any argument is difficult, it is also crucial to thinking and writing about issues. Therefore, I wanted to get feedback from the students about the clarity of my lecture and the extent of their understanding of argument. As a bleary-eyed composition teacher, however, I did not want to receive lengthy essays on the nature of argument or "What argument means to me." Therefore, I adapted one of Cross and Angelo's Classroom Assessment Techniques called the Minute Paper to fit my specific classroom activity.

In the last five minutes of class, I asked students to respond in writing to two questions: What did you

learn about argument during today's class period? and What was the Muddiest Point about today's introduction to argument? In the five minutes that students spent jotting down their brief answers, I gained valuable feedback about the lecture and in-class activity. Many students asked questions about the abstract concept of the link (otherwise called warrant by Toulmin). Students struggled to identify the often unspoken assumptions upon which so many arguments are based. Based on their feedback, I reviewed links during the subsequent class period. I was able to invent several other examples of links that helped clarify the concept for students. In the drafts of their next argument paper, students questioned the assumptions of source authors, something that they may have felt incapable of if it had not been for the feedback I received from the Minute Paper and the discussion that followed.

Using assessment in your classroom does not have to involve a hefty, increased workload. Sometimes spending five minutes to ask students what they're thinking is all that it takes to receive valuable feedback.

Readings on Assessment

Jeffrey Bathe, Psychology

Young, S. & Shaw, D.G. (1999). Profiles of effective college and university teachers. *Journal of Higher Education*, 70, 6, 670-86.

This article discusses a study of 912 undergraduate and graduate students' ratings of previous instructors. Analysis of the data produced a model of teacher effectiveness with a high degree of predictive power.

Kennedy, Cathleen. (2000). *Implications for New Pedagogy in Higher Education: Can Online Technology Enhance Student Engagement & Learning?*

This paper describes the author's research on online higher education. Engagement, online technology, and learning are introduced as three components of online education. The following two research questions are presented: To what extent can we discover factors or dimensions of learning predictive of success in online courses? and To what extent can student achievement in online courses be improved through specific pedagogies used in online courses?

Cross, K. Patricia. (1998, Fall). Classroom research: Implementing the scholarship of teaching. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 75, 5-12.

Classroom assessment and research: An update on uses, approaches, and research findings.

Paulsen, Michael B.; and Feldman, Kenneth A. (1995). *Taking teaching seriously: Meeting the challenge of instructional improvement*. (Eric Document ED396615)

This digest is based on a longer report of the same title that was written in response to a celebrated address by K. Patricia Cross at the 1986 AAHE national Conference on Higher Education in Washington, DC. This digest summarizes current efforts to increase the quality of college teaching. The authors use a model that views strategies for improving instruction as motivation for individual faculty members to improve their teaching.