

The Role of Learning Assessment in Forming Successful Learning Communities

Wednesday, May 23, 2001

Breakout Session A

We would like for this discussion to continue as an ongoing work using the TLT portal, perhaps through threaded discussion forum.

We discussed the physical layout of the room, determined that it does matter to us and decided to circle the tables in order to see each other but also have writing space.

We introduced ourselves and talked about what we saw as key issues to discuss.

- Hoping to talk about the assessment piece which is very interesting to the faculty I work with.
- We have limited resources, and we need collaboration to help expand what we can do with those resources.
- One of latest charges to my office is to get additional information on assessment and tools to integrate assessment in programs.
- Want to work with faculty to develop assessment models for web-enhanced or web-based formats for DL.
- Working to develop resources and assessment tools campus-wide for preparing faculty to prepare dossiers
- Want to focus on the assessment piece--don't know great deal about it, especially the formal part needed for grants. In fine arts, there is assessment process, but not in ABC format so can't assign numbers.
- In building a course with the curriculum to address that need, need clue as to how to start to do that, to incorporate assessment in the curriculum.
- We tend to assess what's easy—number of students, things that have a numerical value. So much tied to numbers, standardized tests. There's more to it than that, how do you get to those issues?
- In course development, the critical area was assessment.
- When we created a center and brought in faculty, we found few people do assessment.
- Assessment is often tied to promotion. It's hard to get information.
- We need to know what to assess, how to do it so it's fair and doesn't penalize people who take risks.
- Universities, in some respects, are not forgiving to those who take risks.
- Wrestling with assessment for a couple of years, designed instrument to assess specific goals, developed indicators and outcomes to test.

- Teaming with faculty on several campuses to do collaborative assessment.
- How do you do it (assessment)? Certain goals, outcomes seems obvious, but critical thinking, to measure those is a mystery.
- Very interested in what students are getting out of this. Can never do enough to find out if we can best give them what they need as well as find out what they've learned.
- Look at the process, what are faculty thinking about when they teach? How do they do a good job with pedagogy?
- What do students do, how do you get students to do what you want them to do? How do you do that anyway (with or without technology)?
- Process of doing online course makes you become better pedagogy reflector.
- Don't know how much you took for granted that you can't take for granted anymore (in an online course environment).
- Once student get into this challenging environment, come up against resistance. On top of subject matter, they are learning the topic and taking a voyage through topic.
- Portfolio process-formative, summative
- Get on the table, different uses, different things to measure
- Can look at easy things, determine if that's what you want to look at

We discussed our format for proceeding and decided to examine the issues that face us as a learning community in considering the role of assessment.

- How do we define our learning community? What is the TLT Collaborative versus who is the board vs who is here? Intersecting community
- What are the characteristics of the people we are teaching?
- Who should be here, who shouldn't be?
- We need to talk to each other about what we're doing in these courses.
- Consider the Old European tradition—it's art, it's my art, so students take the professor, not the course. How do we define what is a course?
- What is critical thinking? Students may think, "I shoot my mouth off, say what I feel, that's critical thinking."
- We can use technology to individualize instruction.
- If we can take the risk, and take the time, to try individualizing.
- In online course, we can use time more strategically--online environment encourages that more, not saying the same thing to everyone.
- Learning is not efficient, takes time.
- Efficiency is based on whether they actually learn.

- Technology enables us to build communities of learning so that the instructor can reflect on whether and what students are actually learning.
- Student has to reflect on whether or not I'm getting what I'm supposed to, allows for professors to be able to reflect on how to move students to learn what it is you want them to grasp—that's where collaborative learning takes place.
- This is important whether you have an asynchronous environment or not.
- Gets created through use of technology and discussion with technology.
- Technology allows you to go to each individual student but in a different way than in the classroom.
- Using the technology becomes a vehicle for learning, just the means by which we get to that outcome.
- A lot has to be centered on the content of the materials.
- Begin with a set of goals of what you want student to learn, have to demonstrate that at end in order to make an assessment.
- What activities do I use to measure whether or not the students use x?
- About the student learning x, x is a moving target. We're going to have to spend a lot of time keeping up with x--what we want them to learn. If teaching Kathy for half an hour, give additional time, this is where technology frees us up to do that.
- From the perspective of the President's office, sitting here with number of hours in class, competing with organizations who don't have that requirement, students can get from a to z in two weeks. At some point we're going to be free from having to be done with this by middle of May.
- A five year undergraduate degree is getting to be the norm.
- We are too much controlled by semesters—if we can figure out assessment, we have a big argument for getting away from semesters.
- Perhaps it could be seen as an extra incentive for students--if you learn this material in half an hour you can leave.
- They have the mentality of punching a time clock.
- We want the rhythm of teaching and learning to not be artificially constrained. If we have the logistical freedom to do other things, what are we looking at as possibilities?
- Threaded discussions with prompts and discussions being sort of like the stop-and-go experiences that move students in their thinking, question is how to manage it.
- Need more opportunity for students to document and understand their own learning.
- Online courses can really encourage students' active participation and recognition of own learning.

- Traditional sit down class prompts students to sit down and wait.
- Preparing them for not having a teacher is preparing them for lifelong learning.
- We need to consider the value of the other students as part of the teaching process.
- Before 1930s, one room school houses, students taught each other
- Model for learning is explosive
- Must consider student-student relationship
- If in an online course environment, they are not having the benefit of other students there. How do we bring students together to create a community of learning?
- I have tried this, still trying to polish it—students post portfolios on web and refer to each other's work. That builds on what you're talking about.
- One of the things that bothers me is a model for learning of each one teach one, people set up for online learning with a different paradigm, others who want face to face. If any one method works, you reach a certain number of students. Is it the instructor's responsibility to cater to every student's needs, student's responsibility to get what they need, or some other approach, like a pre-assessment where one group learns better visually, etc., put them in different courses with different instructors who teach to that style?
- No question that students have different learning styles.
- Some students do well in certain situations, discussions, visual, what we tend to do is look at those 6 or 7 modalities and teach to one percent of that.
- It is a moving x, no matter what we assess, students learn at their own rate, at the instant they are ready to learn, they learn that thing. Don't know that any of those things plug back in to what we typically use to assess—tests, assignments, portfolios.
- I know that technology has potential to begin to assess these things, but don't know that we as educators are at a point to use those tools.
- We still have a horseless carriage, we've not evolved into an automobile. We were taught a certain a way. I give the fact, if you give it back to me, you have learned that body of knowledge, that's efficient. In the end you have to plug it into a grading system, so it's a 94, next time a 92.
- Prediction that one with 94 would be more likely successful than one with 92? How do you express that to a student? We could only accept 20, mat not cut straight, so you're not in.
- If a value is assessed at the end of the teacher's assessment of 94 and 92, I'm trying to think differently about how I would assess that student's portfolio. If I want a student to demonstrate that they have an understanding of the solar system, I would want, in order for each student to

demonstrate learning according to their learning style, to let them choose a way to demonstrate learning—model, videotape, some other fashion. Value is in them understanding solar system in way that is meaningful to them. I can see that might be difficult in the arts, but at some point, artists have to express themselves differently.

- Think about how students demonstrate learning.
- What we tend to do is teach based on how we can assess. We want to do that because we can do that in a fair mode.
- Our assignments in that case are meant to display learning that then can be a means of learning.
- In teaching, we want students to learn about learning.
- Eloquent description of connoisseur-ship of education—in grad school, in arts—which is exact opposite of test-taking skills.
- Tricky difficulty with technology of following through on projects
- Technology is really great at measuring four-distracter, multiple-choice kinds of tests, can do some narrative-type things
- As a person who is frequently asked by faculty what technology can do to help them, a theme I'm hearing is that technology will help them address multiple learning styles. I think its really a lot of back work and you can do that without technology. Not just visual, kinesthetic, every new approach you want to take to getting your content across is going to take work. Technology may help the next time you implement that work, with diagnostic measures etc.
- Are you saying technology doesn't reduce the work? So not!
- How can we do assessments of students that look at their epistemological styles? How do we get at that? How do we use that data in interesting ways to help you teach.
- I can run a million assessments, but it isn't likely to change my teaching because I don't have that time.
- Its not as if you can set something up, do it, and determine if students learned by whether or not they did something.
- Its good to help students learn about their learning so they can tell if they can adapt to your teaching style, and to try to adapt your teaching style to some of their needs.
- Some things are like vocabulary—they should know that
- No matter what their learning styles are, certain things have to be learned the way they are.
- There is a big dividing line, styles=strategies=skills.

- Tend to think about our formal context for learning, don't think about museum, concert hall, very definitely strong things that happen to you, learning that occurs there is very powerful,
- We can give students snatches of text all over the place, much freer than if had to lug in books, or make copies. Let's look at this and how it exemplifies what we discussed.
- What about the terms we are using and what they mean to us?
- We need a common point for conversation, a common point for understanding.
- Barrier-breaking—what does assessment actually mean, language becomes a common communication, then look for boundaries of that definition.
- There is a real need for common language.
- The struggle is when they weren't cut out to do a certain thing and we have to help them get a certain level of competency, for example, in basic studies courses.
- As students progress through the system we invest more and more in the student.
- What is purpose of teaching? Educational Policies Commission, 1961, stated that the purpose of education is to teach students to think so they can be contributing citizens.
- There is a doubleness for each of us—a balance of what I want vs social consciousness
- What is learning? It is when the lightbulb goes off.
- One of the things we might ask ourselves is if it is possible to codify that skill of standing in front of students and you can tell who has it, that's assessment. To know do I need to slow down, are they getting it?
- How do you transfer that to someone else?
- We can intuit that face to face easier than online. Not an intuitive way to use those skills online.
- Many faculty say I can't see myself doing what I do online—don't think the tools are there to deliver that because my style of doing that doesn't have any place online.
- We don't usually have these words or these conversations with colleagues.
- There is no venue for this except the negative comments.
- It's not intuitive. We're superstitious about what works.
- Good teachers are artists—journeymen, interns who are handed down the craft.
- When lightbulb goes off we need to reflect on what works, use those as learning opportunities for ourselves too.

- We don't have language for this and we have to show grant data in numbers.
- We have to make our own portfolio to share.
- This gets back to time but there are options.
- When we leave here we're going to be the minority. It seems idealistic –do tenured faculty care?
- Must have assessment data to evaluate teaching.
- In Georgia, Hope Scholarship requires that students must have B to get funds. When grades drop below B, parents came in and asked if assessments were fair.
- The question about whether DE courses are equal to regular courses makes us ask how regular courses are evaluated.
- Those of us with PhDs but no education courses are in position of wondering—what is an A? How can we be specific in our assessment? Pass or no pass is easier than A vs B.
- If we identify discrepancies between objectives of students, teachers, institution, jobs in community--if there are competing agenda—what are strategies for dealing with that?
- We need to be teaching students to learn, not just how to pretend to learn.

Next Steps—we will discuss the meaning of the terms below and look at best practices in assessment.

Assessment

Evaluation

Summative/Formative

Criterion-references/Norm-referenced

Learning Styles/Learning Preferences

Individualizing Instruction

Test

Goals/Objectives

Informal Contexts of Learning

Experiential Learning

Collaboration

Fair/Valid/Reliable

Grades

Pedagogy