

Contemplations on Assessment

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What do we want from assessment?

Inspire students to

1. achieve and demonstrate conceptual understanding of the material.
2. use the skills and understanding developed in this class/program to address problems they see as relevant to some of their own life goals.
3. achieve and demonstrate procedural competence in the important techniques covered in the course.

Types of Assessment

- Diagnostic Assessment
- Formative Assessment
- Summative Assessment
- Authentic Assessment

We're all pretty experienced in

- **Summative Assessment.** Here we test the students at the end of the chapter, or the end of the semester, or the end of the program, to evaluate the student.
- **Diagnostic Assessment.** Here we ascertain, prior to instruction, each student's strengths, weaknesses, knowledge and skills.

Our courses/programs could benefit from more attention to

- **Formative Assessment.** Students are assessed as an integral part of instruction to inform and guide teachers as they make instructional decisions.
- **Authentic Assessment.** Students are required to demonstrate competence at using the material in real-world situations, which promotes integration of factual knowledge, higher-order understanding and relevant skills.

More about Formative Assessment

- Is it only for guiding the teachers? Perhaps this idea is the “purist form.”
- Students learn what the teacher thinks is important in a low-stakes situation – it’s not really a problem if they make errors here.
- Can include harder questions or questions requiring more thought than would be asked on a regular test.
- It’s useful to include these in the grading process for the course so that students will participate, but mainly just as “effort” or “participation” grades.

Current-day challenges

- Read only by skimming
- “I punched the buttons on the calculator (computer) just as you told me to and this is what it gave. Of course it must be right – how can you say it’s not?”
- “But I had a good reason to miss class – you can’t count me absent!”
- Many teachers believe that the increased emphasis on standardized tests in K-12 is not supporting all the important aspects of learning

Examples of Formative Assessment

- Minute papers
- Muddiest point
- Empty outlines
- One-sentence summary
- Student-generated test questions

These ideas and more in Angelo and Cross,
Classroom Assessment Techniques, 1993,
Jossey-Bass (Wiley)

What I do

- Encourage self-reflection about homework (required cover page with annotations)
- Daily take-home quiz that I go over at the beginning of class. Almost always requires some interpretation or explanation as well as computation.
- Require students to talk with each other in class and explain things to each other.
- Do quite a bit of “spiraling” through the material in most of my courses

Evaluation of teachers -
ACC Math Department's process:

- Copies of all tests and major assignments for several courses – peer-reviewed
- “How I taught the course” – peer -reviewed
- Student evaluations
- Grade distribution data
- Answers to various other questions common to all departments at the college, including a question asking for the teacher's response to the student evaluations.

Conclusion

- Need to identify all the important outcomes we expect, not just those that are easy to assess.
- Need to design activities that engage students and require them to integrate skills and understanding, while not worrying too much about how they'll be graded.
- Encourage teachers to expand the types of assessment they are willing to use.

