

**Assessing Self:
Extending Student Assessment to Involve Students as Assessors**

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[English 5365: Studies in Computers and Writing (Assessment)]
June 30, 2010

Assignment

Short Paper, 15% (June 30): You will write a 1500-2000 word paper which should attempt to extend the discussion of a specific topic or methodology beyond the scope of class discussions and readings. In addition to including sources from class readings, this paper should incorporate additional research (at least 3-5 new sources) to develop its thesis. See the Grading Rubric section [of the course syllabus] for ideas on methods of writing and development. A functional link to this assignment must be posted on the online portfolio by the due date along with a short abstract.

Abstract

It seems that most of our readings center on what the institution is trying to do, what the department is trying to accomplish and communicate, what the program and/or instructor is after. This paper approaches the assessment conversation from a slightly more rhetorically-oriented position, wherein student perception, student motivation, and student ownership might be made more central to the assessment process.

Keywords: self-efficacy, self-assessment, motivation, assessment

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Extending Student Assessment to Involve Students as Assessors

“So what?” These two little words plague me as an employee, as manager, as a communicator, as a teacher, even as a parent. I find myself asking them all of the time, across the entire spectrum of my various roles and responsibilities. From the boardroom to the classroom, the value of each conversation, meeting, and lesson seems to hinge on the answer to those two little words.

Bloom’s taxonomy is much more elegant in its labeling and categorization of my “so what” factor. He names it, this highest level of cognitive learning, as “evaluate.” He elaborates this grouping with specific words that include a long list of “so what” verbs including the following: appraise, argue, assess, compare, conclude, consider, contrast, critique (Miller, 2010).

The goal of this paper is to extend the discussion of assessment by introducing a few “so what” or, more precisely, “rhetorically motivating” elements to the conversation. To do so we will shake hands and exchange pleasantries with current research in the following areas of the affective domain: (a) scaffolding in learning and (b) student self-efficacy through the self-assessment process. Beyond these introductions, we will also briefly discuss challenges and unknowns in the process of student self-assessment.

Affective Approaches

The following approaches are a succinct attempt to facilitate conversation around a sampling of approaches that deserve further investigation. These sections seek to highlight and describe successful applications of student-centered approaches to teaching and learning, specifically in the context of assessing student performance.

Scaffolding

As in a large construction project, the constructivist approach to teaching and learning deliberately decreases the instructor's primacy as the distributor of information over time. This decreasing role is replaced with that of facilitator; instructors guide and direct learner interactions wherein knowledge is explored, debated, investigated, and created. Recently a nearby university made transcripts of its teacher and TA interactions with students, codifying each as one type of approach to encourage social-constructivist learning. Their ideology is captured nicely here:

The instructor and the TAs developed a mentoring relationship in a community of practice that enhanced learning in a manner resembling Tu and McIsaac's (2001) descriptions . . . In conclusion, students—TAs, facilitators, and discussion participants—taught reciprocally through distributed expertise. The course design provided scaffolding to help students become facilitators of learning.
(Murphy, Mahoney, Chun-Ying, Mendoza-Diaz, & Xiaobing, 2005, p. 357)

This departure from the traditional university lecture format is not surprising; the online forum wherein the course was held likely served as a valuable catalyst for the progressive approach to teaching and learning.

This particular article failed to address the formal assessment mechanisms of student learning; rather its stated focus was process efficacy. It seems that process efficacy is impossible to measure without some assessment of student learning. This duly acknowledged, Murphy clearly reports that scaffolded facilitation of student dialogue “turn[ed] students into discussion facilitators who elicited participants’ higher-order thinking and engagement with the content” (p. 354). It is implied here that the students’ ongoing self-assessment of their responsibilities as discussion facilitators required a higher level of personal participation, which encouraged learning by course design. Because of the immediacy of feedback and the social ramifications of

one's successful performance, it is possible that this may be effective even when student motivation is minimal. The possibility of such a desirable outcome deserves further research.

Self-Efficacy Through Student Self-Evaluation

Andrade, Wang, Du, and Akawi (2009) conducted an interesting experimental study where rubrics were distributed and writer self-evaluation activities were facilitated in a secondary learning environment. The results indicated a statistically significant increase in the overall self-efficacy and demonstrated learning of (girls) mastery-centered students versus the (boys) performance-oriented students (pp. 295-296). Further, the article cites other studies that show a significant difference in providing girls with a rubric (decreased performance) and facilitating rubric-referenced self-assessment activities (increased performance).

If we project that task mastery develops in learners with age, and that personality and relationship driven performance decreases for learners as their social networks expand, it appears that rubric-referenced self-assessment deserves much further investigation in the collegiate realm.

Challenges in Student Self-Assessment

For those who would use self-assessment as a measure of cognitive learning, there is reason for proceeding with caution. Sitzmann, Ely, Brown, & Bauer (2010) report that their own extensive review of literature on the topic and original research efforts agree that self-assessment of skills and mastery is often highly inaccurate (p. 181). This said, it is important to remember that the theme of this paper is not aimed to improve measures of cognitive learning, but rather, to invest in the other side of the coin: affective learning.

With this as our stated purpose, it is encouraging then, to read, "Consistent with theory, self-assessments of knowledge have been shown in prior research to have moderate to large

correlations with affective outcomes. Moreover, these correlations are generally stronger than the relationship between self- assessments and cognitive learning” (Sitzmann, et al., p. 172).

Conclusion

“So what?” you may be asking. “Good question,” Barron replies!

If and when the “so what” factor is accessible, relevant, and meaningful to the listeners, my own anecdotal experience is that these engaged audience members intellectually leap from their seats. Running headlong onto the battlefield of dialogue, they become willing and eager participants in a process they believe will have some important impact.

The alternative is disheartening. I am regularly dismayed to find incoming university students whose experience in the pre-collegiate realm of pedagogy has left them (stereotypically) to believe that their educational opportunities are really deceptively packaged educational burdens of bureaucracy and credentialing. These, they explain, must be endured for the sake of securing a good job in the distant and nebulous future of “the real world.” It seems like pre-collegiate educational experiences have surreptitiously made off with this vital “so what” factor, right under our very noses.

The regularity and consistency of these exhausting student experiences makes it incredibly taxing to realistically extend the discussion of assessment unless one has already resolved the matter of motivation. Even the most robust discussion of refined tactics, innovative methods, and detailed rubrics pales in its ultimate efficacy when undermined by the lack (or complete absence) of student motivation. In response to this reality, and prompted by the rhetorical emphasis within my academic discipline, it seemed appropriate and valuable to focus

this assignment on a discussion of assessments that might positively impact affective deficiencies in the student learning domain.

The area of student affect involves beliefs, values, and motivations; these areas seem to fall beyond the scope of our assigned readings. To date these have centered primarily on what an institution, department, program, and/or instructor is seeking to accomplish. It seems that the more rhetorically-informed assessment strategy might take a very different stance: position student perception, student motivation, and student ownership much more centrally within the assessment process.

The primary purposes of engaging students in careful self-assessment are to boost learning and achievement, and to promote academic self-regulation, or the tendency to monitor and manage one's own learning. Research suggests that self-regulation and achievement are closely related: Students who set goals, make flexible plans to meet them, and monitor their progress tend to learn more and do better in school than students who do not. Self-assessment is a core element of self-regulation because it involves awareness of the goals of a task and checking one's progress toward them. As a result of self-assessment, both self-regulation and achievement can increase.
(Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009, p. 13)

References

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